

...middle features He'll present his findings in the unusual rock, which will an- formed in an extreme fashion,

# Houston museum on Lucy quest <sup>p. B-5</sup>

It hopes to be the first to host the prehistoric woman's remains.

BY PAM EASTON  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON — Officials from the Houston Museum of Natural Science were set Saturday to travel all the way to Ethiopia — for a fossil.

But not just any fossil. They'll be on a quest for the East African country's precious Lucy, a 3.2-million-year-old fossil considered by some to be the "Holy Grail" of anthropology.

The museum wants to host Lucy's first public display next year and, under an existing proposal, organize a possible four-year U.S. tour. Other stops could include New York, Washington, Chicago and Los Angeles.

"We have had extensive access to their collections, but then there is always more. It is a huge country," said Dirk Van Tuerenhout, the museum's curator of anthropology. "It is an embarrassment of riches."

The famous fossil makes up about 40 percent of a skeleton of a woman who died between her

25th and 30th birthdays. She is the "most complete, best-preserved skeleton of any erect-walking human ancestor that has ever been found," according to "Lucy: The Beginnings of Humankind," a book co-written by Donald Johanson, one of her discoverers.

During the two-week trip, Van Tuerenhout, also the museum's president and its director of collections, will meet with Ethiopian museum officials, dignitaries and political leaders.

City Councilwoman Ada Edwards will join them. During officials' first trip last year, she got to see Lucy.

"It was just awesome just to stand there and look at this and say we are all from this person," she said.

"I can't even describe it. I can't put it into words."

A final agreement between the Houston museum and Ethiopian officials is close, Van Tuerenhout said Friday. Edwards expects portions of the agreement could be completed during the trip.

"This will be an exhibit that will draw a lot of people," Van Tuerenhout said. "We are all taking this one step at a time."

On the trip, the Houston officials will see the Ethiopian Na-

tional Palace and National Museum. Lucy's fossilized bones are kept there, secured from public view.

They'll also visit historic sites throughout the country, including Ethiopia's largest cathedral in Axum, mural paintings in Bahar Dar and the walled city of Harar, considered the fourth-most holy site in Islam, according to the group's itinerary.

Tuerenhout said the trip should help museum officials get a better grasp on how best to share hundreds of thousands of years of Ethiopia's rich history.

"How do you tell a story that will cover 5 million years?" he said.

"It has to be representative. It has to be eye-catching."

The museum would like to include some of the crowns, regalia and manuscripts written in a language that is no longer spoken.

Some U.S. museum curators have criticized the plan to send Lucy abroad. They fear the prized fossil could be damaged.

Ethiopian officials hope a tour would encourage tourism and investment in their country.

Van Tuerenhout has said there is no safe way to display Lucy in Ethiopia.

At the end of the U.S. tour, all

the items associated with the exhibit will be returned to Ethiopia so the fossil can finally go on public display there, Van Tuerenhout said.