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Malta to premiere Discovery Channel feature on Leonardo

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Malta's newest movie star is 77 million years old.

Leonardo — the world's best preserved dinosaur, not the "Titanic" heart throb — is the subject of a Discovery Channel documentary three years in the making.

The one-hour film will debut at a special screening Sept. 6 in Malta, more than a week before it premieres on the Discovery Channel at 10 p.m. Sept. 14.

Leonardo, who was discovered in 2000 on the Hammond ranch outside of Malta, is so well-preserved that even his last meal has been fossilized within his intestines. Scientists say his skin, joints and organs could reveal the answers to questions millions of years old.

Famed paleontologist Dr. Bob Bakker called the documentary one of the best, if not the best, dinosaur movies he has seen.

The documentary features a familiar backdrop in the Hi-Line's badlands and research at the Dinosaur Field Station.

"There's a bajillion dinosaur shows out there. This one, the crew is really good and they took their time," Bakker said. "And they had a big enough budget to do some fascinating animation."

Bakker and other scientists have studied Leonardo since the duckbill was discovered. Bakker also is the curator of the Houston Museum of Natural Science, which has created a special exhibit around Leonardo called "Dinosaur Mummy CSI: Cretaceous Science Investigation."

The exhibit opens to the public Sept. 19, with more than 1,000 advance tickets already purchased.

The documentary gives Malta's new dinosaur museum and the Houston exhibit extra — and free — publicity.

Last week, a 35-ton crane operated by experts who move priceless art lowered Leonardo into his temporary home in Texas. Crews still are scrambling to paint silkscreen backdrops, write labels for elements of the exhibit and finish computer graphics.

In addition, the museum staff has spent 1,500 hours cleaning another Malta fossil named Peanut, who also will be featured.

Over the next year, exact replicas of Peanut and Leonardo will be on display in Malta's Great Plains Dinosaur Museum, which opened in June, while the real fossils star in the Houston exhibit.

The Malta museum will receive a cut of ticket profits in Houston and it stands to make money from sales of the Discovery Channel film.

Once the Houston exhibit closes, some portions of it will return to Malta while others will become part of a touring exhibit traveling to other major museums across the country. The touring exhibit will provide the Malta museum with a steady stream of income to help cover operating expenses.
