

'96 Olympic torch to pass through city on June 28

By Seth Blomeley
DAILY Staff Writer

During what he called a "really exciting day for Decatur," Mayor Julian Price said today the city will stage an unprecedented welcome for the Olympic torch as it travels from here to the childhood home of four-time gold medal winner Jesse Owens.

Price joined other civic leaders, police and members of the Boys and Girls Club on the steps of City Hall to announce that the Olympic torch will visit Decatur on June 28, 1996.

"This is a big deal," Price told about 60 gathered for the announcement.

It's yet to be decided on which streets the torch will be carried or who will carry it. Organizers aren't sure how it will be carried either. Runners, athletes in wheelchairs and riders on horseback are options.

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Torch

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"I'm sure the Olympic committee will tell us where they want it to go," Price said.

Lawrence County organizers expect the route of the torch will run by Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville since the community has been listed on the route. A statue of the Oakville native surrounded by the five Olympic rings will be ready in March.

Unveiling of the statue honoring Owens — who, as a black man winning four track and field gold medals, stunned the 1936 Olympics hosted by Hitler's Germany — will be postponed if the relay runs by the park, seven miles south of Moulton off Alabama 157.

But the event will have local input. The theme for the national torch relay will be local heroes, so local Morgan County heroes will have a chance to run. A committee led by the city, United Way and Decatur Coca-Cola Bottling Co. will lead the selection process of runners. Details on the celebration haven't been finalized.

Walt Schmidbauer presented the city with an Olympic torch banner.

City Planner Rob Walker — dressed in an early 19th-century naval uniform, symbolic of the city's namesake, Commodore Stephen Decatur — carried the flag to a color guard of Decatur police who raised it in front of City Hall.

Price said he looks forward to the

event because the world will be looking at Decatur and its rich history, beauty, industry and commercial base.

The torch will be brought from Huntsville and will spend the night in Decatur before traveling to Oakville.

The '96 torch will be lighted in Olympia, Greece, then flown to the United States for the relay. The relay will begin its U.S. run on April 1 in Los Angeles. It will arrive in Decatur — the site of the 1996 Olympic Games — July 19.

During the 84 days of the 15,000-

mile torch relay, it will pass through 42 states and 29 state capitals. The run will cover about 13½ hours each day, with each torch bearer carrying the flame for one kilometer, or .62 miles. The flame will remain lighted overnight and be passed to a new torch site to start each day's run.

The torch will be carried by several different modes of transportation. In San Francisco, a cable car will carry it. In Seattle, it will be ferried across Puget Sound. And in Nebraska, Pony Express riders will carry the flame by horseback.

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MONTGOMERY

Torch to stop at birthplace of Jesse Owens

The Olympic Torch will make ten stops in Alabama before the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, including Jesse Owens' hometown of Oakville.

The announcement was made Sunday afternoon on a televised special on NBC.

The olympic flame will also stop in Huntsville, Decatur, Cullman, Birmingham, Clanton, Selma, Montgomery, Troy and Dothan before heading into Florida.

Huntsville civic leaders are planning a brief ceremony today at 1:30 p.m. at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center Museum. Decatur Mayor Julian Price, anticipating that Oakville will be on the route, said he's tentatively set a "public celebration" for Monday at 8:30 a.m. in front of Decatur City Hall.

Owens was one of America's greatest athletes of the 20th century. He won four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, and on one day, May 25, 1935, he set three track and field world records and tied another.

A statue of Owens, surrounded by the five Olympic rings, is due to be unveiled next March at the Jesse Owens Park on Alabama 157, 14 miles southwest of Decatur.