

# Panel making big plans for torch visit

By Tom Smith  
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OAKVILLE — Nearly 60 years after Jesse Owens became an Olympic hero, residents of Lawrence County are still carrying the torch for him.

The pride felt by many as the Lawrence native won four gold medals and became an international track star will again be felt next year as the Olympic Torch makes a special stop at his birthplace.

The Olympic Torch Committee announced last week that Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville has been included as a stop for the ceremonial flame as it makes its way to the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta.

"It was like a dream come true," said Therman White, a member of the committee that has been working to develop the park near where Owens was born. "It's the news

we had been waiting and hoping to hear. It's going to be something special."

James Pinion, another member of the Jesse Owens Committee, said the torch will stop in Oakville, just south of Moulton off Alabama 157, on June 29, 1996, the 64th day of its 84-day journey from Los Angeles to Atlanta.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime thing for us," Pinion said. "(The torch) will be coming through Huntsville, to Decatur and to Oakville. From here it goes to Birmingham, through the state, into Florida and comes back through Georgia before reaching Atlanta to start the games on July 19."

Pinion said the torch will visit 42 states on its venture and travel 15,000 miles.

## 10,000 to carry torch

"The committee will use 10,000 torchbearers and there will be a 110-member

support group traveling with the torch," he said. "It's going to be a big event."

Committee members came up with the idea last year and Pinion contacted Dr. Leroy Walker, president of the U.S. Olympic Committee and a longtime friend of Owens.

Pinion said Walker and other Olympic Committee members liked the idea.

"We've been waiting since last year to hear this news," White said. "I've always said all good things are slow and this was, but it was worth the wait."

The Jesse Owens Committee has a lot already planned for the day the torch visits the Oakville park. Pinion said he hopes all living members of Owens' immediate family will be present for the celebration.

"I've talked with (Owens') brother and he's excited about coming," Pinion said. "He said he and the rest of his family would be

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## Panel prepares for torch

ready."

A Birmingham sculptor has also been commissioned to create a statue of Owens that will be unveiled the day of the celebration.

The committee also hopes to have a replica of his birthplace and a museum in place for the event.

"We've also come up with the idea of having a replica of the torch there and letting the Owens' family light it from the Olympic Torch," Pinion said. "The replica would then burn constantly at the park and carry the Olympic spirit with it always."

Pinion said as soon as the excite-

ment of last week's announcement wears off, the local committee will begin work on putting the celebration together.

### Event less than year away

"It's less than a year away, so we've got to get in gear," he said. "We've got a lot of work to do. Right now, we're all overwhelmed by this, but we can't back off now. We've got to keep moving forward with this."

"I can't think of a better way to promote the Olympics than for the Olympic Torch to pay a visit to where one of the greatest Olympic champions ever was born."