

# '96 Olympic torchbearers sought for Decatur stretch

By Jackie Fair  
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The Olympic games of ancient Greece could begin only after a sacred truce was called. Runners, known as heralds of peace sounded a clarion, trumpeting the truce.

Ten thousand modern day heralds of peace will be selected this fall to carry the 1996 Olympic torch through 3,000 U.S. communities, including Oakville and Decatur. The torchbearers will include 5,500 community heroes identified through local United Way offices, 2,000 Olympians and 2,500 individu-

als selected by Coca-Cola, sponsor of the torch relay.

Details of the selection process are not yet set, but more will be known next week, said John Abbott, executive director of the Morgan County United Way. Abbott attended a meeting in Montgomery on Friday, where more details of the selection process were confirmed, he said.

An organizer of the Montgomery leg of the torch relay, said Decatur is on the route because of its proximity to Oakville, birthplace of 1936 Olympic gold medalist Jesse Owens. Also, because it's on the path to Birmingham, site of the Olympic

## Choose your runners

When the selection process begins this fall, who would you nominate as a local hero worthy of carrying the Olympic torch in Lawrence County and Decatur? Tell us by calling PressCall at 340-1111, then category 4000.



soccer games.

"They automatically put Decatur on the map because of Oakwood and Birmingham," said Jim Incoe, chairman of the Montgomery

Please see **Torch**, page A12

## Torch

Continued from page A1

Chamber of Commerce gold medal committee.

He said getting Montgomery on the route took some effort.

"Lobbying? You bet. We've been making contacts in Atlanta and just worked as long as it took until they announced last Sunday that it would go through Montgomery," said Incoe.

Both Abbott and John Seymour, president of the Decatur Chamber of Commerce, said they didn't make any contacts with the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) to ensure Decatur's place on the torch route.

"I think I mentioned to one person (on the Olympic committee) about Oakville and Jesse Owens birthplace," said Abbott. "The next thing I know Huntsville, Decatur and Oakville are on the route."

He said a selection committee will be appointed to review nominations for the local torchbearers.

The Lawrence County Commission says the Jesse Owens Memorial Park Board is the official coor-

## Torch facts

- ▶ The torch relay will span 15,000 U.S. miles
- ▶ The torch route begins in Los Angeles where the torch arrives from Greece, April 27, to Atlanta where the torch will arrive at the Olympic Stadium, July 19.
- The torch will also:
  - ▶ Pass through 42 states plus Washington, D.C.
  - ▶ Come within two hours of 90 percent of the U.S. population.
  - ▶ Burn in the United States for 100 days.
  - ▶ Travel an average of 182 miles per day, 14 miles per hour, 13.5 hours a day.
  - ▶ Cover 438 Alabama miles.

dinator for the run when it passes by the track legend's birthplace at Oakville.

James Pinon, Auburn University extension agent, will coordinate events throughout the county.

The Olympic torch will be carried into the area June 28, 1996, arriving first in Huntsville and then in Decatur. On June 29, the torch will leave Decatur and be carried to

Oakville and on to Cullman en route to Birmingham.

Historians claim the symbol of the Olympic flame is derived from ancient Greek mythology and the goddess Hera whose shrine is in the home of the Olympic Games.

The Greeks kindled the flame with a type of crucible, positioned toward the sun to gather heat and set the grass on fire.

The flame was kindled and carried to a ceremony where it was handed to a runner and the games began.

The modern version of the ancient torch ritual was brought back for the 1936 Olympics in Berlin when the torch relay was first launched.

ACOG materials emphasize that the torch relay does not represent the passing of a torch, but instead the passing of a sacred flame.

Each torch bearer will carry the torch one kilometer.

However, plans for the torch relay will include passing the torch not only by runners, but also by bicycle, train, horseback, canoe, steamboat, plane and sailboat. ACOG encourages persons with disabilities to apply to carry the torch.