

Readers name favorites for Olympic relay

By Jackie Fair
DAILY Staff Writer

A Special Olympian, a high school coach and a judge were suggested by readers of THE DAILY as torchbearers when the 1996 Olympic flame is carried through Oakville and Decatur next summer.

The torch relay will span 15,000 U.S. miles, 438 of those through Alabama.

Torchbearers will include 5,500 "community heroes" identified through local United Way offices, 2,000 Olympians and 2,500 individuals selected by Coca-Cola, sponsor of the torch relay.

PressCall received 58 calls in response to an Aug. 6 article asking readers to choose a local hero worthy of carrying the Olympic torch in Lawrence County and Decatur. Some names were suggested by more than one caller.

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Atlanta 1996

torchbearers will be selected, though he will offer suggestions. The park board plans a 17-acre park in Owens' name, part of which will be completed in time for the Olympic torch relay, Pinion said. Jesse Owens' mother and three daughters will be in Oakville when the torch passes through, said Marlene Rankin, Owens' youngest daughter, who now lives in Chicago.

A star of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Owens won medals in the 100-meter dash, 200-meter dash, 400-meter relay and running broad jump.

State Olympic torch relay organizers have said Oakville was put on the torch relay path because it was the birthplace of Owens and Decatur was added because it was in the path between Oakville and Birmingham.

Torch nominees

These are the people that some readers of THE DAILY want to see carrying the 1996 Olympic torch through the area next summer. Numbers indicate how many calls were received for that person:

- ▶ Sherrie Brown — Morgan County Circuit Judge
- ▶ Ricky Nichols — East Lawrence High School football coach
- ▶ Griff Alexander, 2 — Moulton fourth-grader chosen Alabama's 1995 Easter Seal poster child
- ▶ Dr. Randal Ray — Decatur dentist
- ▶ Jim Worley — Osco Inc. sales representative
- ▶ Randall Ledlow, 2 — helps poor children with medical expenses
- ▶ Al Ashton — Olympic bobsledder lives in Hartselle
- ▶ Tiffany Young — East Lawrence High all-state basketball player
- ▶ Avery Thornhill — D-day veteran
- ▶ Cross-country team members from the high schools
- ▶ Dot Collins — employed with United Parcel Service in Decatur
- ▶ Dr. Paul McCain — Decatur physician and runner
- ▶ Abby and Adam Neville — teen brother and sister with disabilities
- ▶ Gary Redus — former professional baseball player
- ▶ Phil Curry, 2 — senior age, long-distance runner
- ▶ Larry Duke — distance runner
- ▶ Pat Forton — Decatur runner
- ▶ DeWayne Key, 2 — runner and former Lawrence County school superintendent
- ▶ Gary Johnson — Lawrence County High School varsity boys basketball coach
- ▶ Michael Cryer, 2 — Eva, retired military
- ▶ Keith Hallmark — runner, instructor at Calhoun
- ▶ John Cochran, 7 — Hartselle, runner, coach at Hartselle High

"They might just go to the United Way and tell them to do it."

The United Way of Morgan County will be handling the nominations of local hero torchbearers as soon as they are instructed to do so, Abbott said.

Abbott attended an ACOG torch relay meeting in Montgomery on Aug. 4 and said all he learned was that no information would be forthcoming until October, when local United Way offices will be provided with application forms and guidelines.

"I think probably what we will do is look for volunteers and see who is interested and then select individuals who we think will be good," said Abbott of how the selection committee will be chosen by United Way.

"We've been working on getting the torch through Oakville for years and evidently we got the job done," said Pinion.

"I don't think I'll have anything to do with selecting the torchbearers. We don't even know how many we'll have or how they'll be selected," said Pinion. "I've already accomplished what I set out to do."

Pinion added, however, that he will offer suggestions to ACOG if asked.

"My suggestion is to have one-fourth of them selected by lottery, one-fourth by the Memorial Park board, one-fourth by the Jesse Owens Memorial Run Committee and one-fourth by the United Way," said Pinion, county agent coordinator with Auburn University Extension Service.

- School
- ▶ Lewis G. Mohacsy — supervisor for international education forum
- ▶ Bobby Dotson — participated in Special Olympics in Connecticut
- ▶ Johnny Albert — runner and coach at Gordon-Bibb School
- ▶ Laura Armes — Decatur karate champion
- ▶ Harris Blackwell, 7 — 14-year-old Special Olympian swimmer, third-place 1995 national Special Olympics
- ▶ Deborah Shelton, 5 — Decatur, marathon runner
- ▶ Phillip Parker, 4 — distance runner
- Unable to contact, identify
- ▶ Ben Vaughan Sr.
- ▶ Stanley Johnson, 4, Lawrence County
- ▶ Autumn Hogue
- ▶ Max Seagle, Decatur
- ▶ Warren King
- ▶ David Green, Lawrence County



DAILY Photo by Gary Cosby Jr.

John Cochran, Hartselle girls basketball coach, tied for the most PressCall votes to carry the Olympic torch. The relay will pass through Decatur and Oakville.

Relay

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"It's a total shock," said Morgan County Circuit Court Judge Sherrie Brown, whose name was the first called in to PressCall. "I would not be a very fast runner but I'd be honored to do it."

The torch will be carried into the area June 28, 1996, arriving first in Huntsville and then in Decatur. The torch will then be carried to Oakville on June 29 and proceed to Birmingham, site of the Olympic soccer games.

The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) encourages people with disabilities to carry the torch and has planned for the torch to be passed, not only by runners, but also by bicycle, train, horseback, canoe, steamboat, plane and sailboat.

Still, several runners were suggested as local heroes.

Someone thought Keith Hallmark would be an ideal torchbearer, though the ultramarathon runner doesn't know who nominated him. The Calhoun Community College computer instructor has been running 18 of his 39 years. His longest ultramarathon: 42 miles.

The selection of the Decatur torchbearers will be made by a yet-to-be-appointed committee chosen by the United Way of Morgan County, said John Abbott, United Way executive director.

James Pinion, vice chairman of the Jesse Owens Memorial Park board, is unsure how the Oakville

He said once ACOG establishes the criteria for the torchbearers, those interested in carrying it may be able to apply to the selection committee.

Though the PressCall poll is unofficial, both Abbott and Pinion were interested in hearing what names were suggested locally. After hearing the names, Pinion said "it was good to know."

Abbott said he didn't know whether he would give the unofficial list of names to the selection committee this fall, but he said some of the suggested names were interesting.

"The selection committee has a challenge ahead of them."

The relay will begin in Los Angeles on April 27 and end in Atlanta on July 19 during the opening ceremonies for the 1996 Olympics.