

Park

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While the 17.5-acre park amidst cow fields isn't ready for the Olympic torch passing through Oakville on June 29, construction crews are crawling over the land.

Park coordinator James Pinion, who just months ago expressed concern about his looming deadline, was relaxed as he gave a tour of the park marking Owens' 1913 birthplace.

He has collected the \$14 million in grants and donations needed to complete the park in honor of Owens, the son of a Lawrence County sharecropper who shattered Adolf Hitler's dream of Aryan supremacy when he won four gold medals in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin.

Pinion expects most of the park to be finished before crowds, camera crews and international attention arrive.

"We will have enough out here that we can be proud of."

But Pinion said there may be glitches.

While the Owens museum will be built by the park's opening, it likely won't be ready to open until the end of the year. Pinion said construction on the museum will begin this week.

"It takes time to put a museum together," said Pinion, who is meeting with a group of museum curators Wednesday to do a museum "needs assessment."

Pinion doesn't want to charge fee to use park

By Lesley Farrey Pacey
DAILY Staff Writer

OAKVILLE — It will cost about \$65,000 a year to operate, maintain and promote the Jesse Owens Memorial Park once it opens.

But park coordinator James Pinion doesn't think charging admission to generate funds would be appropriate. "I can't see charging because he (Jesse Owens) left here poor."

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Coming to life

Workers push to complete Owens Park

By Lesley Farrey Pacey
DAILY Staff Writer

OAKVILLE — Until recently, the Jesse Owens Memorial Park wasn't much more than an overgrown pasture split by a winding gravel road.

There were promises, plans and grants made for an elaborate park for the 1936 Olympic hero, but not much proof of progress.

Not anymore.

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Ricky Weaver does the detail work at the information center.

The information center at Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville is nearing completion.

DAILY Photos by Gary Colby Jr.

Once completed, the museum will feature Owens' running uniform and track shoes, photos, articles, various memorabilia and possibly an interactive computer that allows visitors to gauge their running speed against Owens'.

Also, there's a chance the park could open before an eight-lane Olympic track and an Olympic torch court are built.

Pinion said he hopes money will be left from other construction projects to pay for the track and bleachers estimated at \$110,000 and the \$25,000 torch court anchored by a sculpture of the 1936 Olympic torch that burns eternally.

"We know how much money we got, but I'm not sure how far it will go."

He has asked Monsanto Chemical Co., Alabama Power, Champion International Inc. and the state for funds for the torch court.

Construction crews already have built six picnic pavilions and a fence around a baseball field. Renovations are about half complete to an old house that will be a welcome center. Workers last week nailed, sawed and coated the welcome center in white paint. They recently added a wraparound porch and green tin roof to the structure and are working on a rock fireplace. Later, they will refinish the cabin's hardwood floors.

When the cabin is complete, visitors can sit in rocking chairs or a swing on the porch.

Pinion said Contractor Kenneth Lambert will lay stones in a semi-

circle from front steps to the welcome center, cutting the top stone in the shape of Alabama and sandblasting a spot to mark Oakville.

"It will be something different," Pinion said. "It will be an attention getter."

A three-room rustic tenant house, which resembles Owens' childhood home, has undergone structural repairs but won't be completed until after it is moved a few yards south to make room for the museum. Owens lived in a similar house until he was 9 and his family moved to Ohio.

A bronze sculpture of Owens crafted by Birmingham sculptor Branko Medenica, is almost ready to be placed in the park. The Lawrence County Commission recently contracted with a local construction company to build a surrounding gold medalion court.

And there are less obvious improvements on the way.

Pinion said a barbed wire fence enclosing a field of cows on the south end of the park needs to be moved several yards back to make room for bleachers. A wooden fence that borders a newly paved Lawrence County 203 needs to be extended to straddle the south end of the property.

State funds will pave a gravel road that winds through the park, but that won't be done until construction crews and their heavy equipment leave. Sod also needs to be laid, trees and shrubs planted, parking lots paved. Playground equipment is on the way.

Owens

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Pinion said the park will need to hire senior citizens to work in the welcome center, the museum and to secure the grounds.

Pinion prefers a volunteer contribution box at the welcome center and that visitors only be charged for special park events.

He said fund-raisers, including golf tournaments, "black tie" dinners, and an annual track competition at the park can be used to raise money to pay for park employees and upkeep.

Pinion said athletes could compete in the four events in which Owens won gold medals in the 1936 Olympics. Owens won the 100- and

200-meter dashes, the long jump and as a member of the 400-meter relay team.

"It would be interesting to see if a person could win all four like he did," he said.

He said the operating funds the first year may come through his employer, Auburn University. Pinion, an extension agent for the university, said the park could be funded as a "demonstration project" showing how to "promote, operate and run a park."