

Replica of Olympic flame to burn at Owens park

By Lesley Farrey Pacey
DAILY Staff Writer

OAKVILLE — The Olympic torch will burn at the Jesse Owens Memorial Park long after runners carry it through here this summer.

That's because James Pinion, coordinator of the Jesse Owens Park project, has determined grant money is available to pay for a 5-foot stainless steel replica of the 1936 torch.

Pinion said Wednesday he plans to ask Birmingham sculptor Branko Medenica — who crafted an 8-foot bronze likeness of the 1936 Olympic great to be unveiled June 29 — to begin work on the torch that will burn eternally. He said the sculpture will take about six weeks to complete.

The torch will be lit by Owens' widow, Ruth, during a June 29 ceremony when the Olympic torch comes through Oakville. The sculpture will rest on a 1-foot granite base, surrounded by a brick court near the museum.

Pinion, who in February said there may not be enough money for the \$25,000 torch court, said Wednesday that some of the \$1.4 million in grant funds awarded to the park can be used.

Pinion and members of the Jesse Owens Park Committee also learned these developments in a meeting Tuesday with Olympic Torch Relay officials and a meeting Wednesday with museum curators:

— including Olympic committee officials, the media and torch runners and security personnel — may be sopping up barbecue during a 30-minute ceremony honoring Jesse Owens. The caravan will stop around 1:40 p.m. for lunch in Oakville when the torch comes through on June 29. Exact times will be firmed up in May.

► Each of the eight Lawrence County torch bearers can select a volunteer to stand with them at exchange points during the run. Those volunteers can then join a caravan through the county along the Olympic torch route.

► Museum curators, who met with the park committee all day Wednesday to do a "needs assessment," likely will have a plan for the Owens museum in about two weeks. 1220 Exhibits, curators of the Birmingham Civil Rights museum and other well-known museums in the state and the southeast, are developing a theme for the \$400,000 to \$500,000 museum and a strategy to promote it.

"They will take what we talked about today and develop a comprehensive plan to develop the museum. We told them what our wishes, wants and desires may be ..."

"We want to make it a place where people want to come back. We told them we want something that is going to be interesting, educational, enjoyable — something for young people and old people and anyone that would come through the museum."

► A 12-car Olympic torch car-