

# Owens

From page A1

The court will feature a special area dedicated to each of the four gold medals, the statue and an eternal flame that will be lit on a replica of the 1936 torch.

Organizers hope the park will bring tourists to Oakville, but they hope it will also be a recreational park for the area residents. The park will include a softball field, basketball courts and walking and running tracks.

Planning and fund-raising have been under way for several years, and construction is under way with organizers saying the park will be ready in time for the torch.

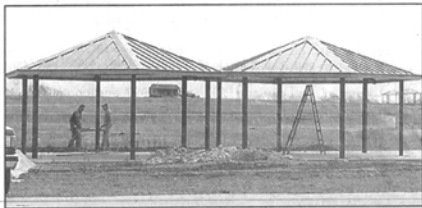
"We are very pleased with the progress," said Thurman White, a long-time Oakville resident who is president of the board of the new park. "This is going to be a real classy park, just the way we wanted it."

Owens was born James Cleveland Owens on Sept. 12, 1913, in Oakville. His family later moved to Cleveland in search of better-paying jobs than were available for blacks in rural Alabama then.

After moving to Cleveland, a teacher misunderstood Owens when he said his name was "J.C." and started calling him Jesse.

Owens became an All-America track star at Ohio State in the 1930s and was the hero of the Olympics at Reich Sports Field Stadium in Berlin in 1936, winning gold medals in the 100-meter-dash, the 200-meter-dash, the long jump and the 400-meter relay.

After the victories, Hitler did not congratulate Owens or the other American winners, a fact that Owens often talked about later in his life.



Stephen Gates/Post-Herald

Allen Preston, left, and Danny Taylor work to finish construction of a pavilion at the Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville. The park will be dedicated June 29.

"It was all right with me. I didn't go to Berlin to shake hands with him, anyway. All I know is I'm here and Hitler isn't," Owens was quoted as saying.

After the Olympics, Owens returned to a mostly segregated America, where he initially worked as a janitor.

Owens later went on to work as a motivational speaker and a public relations executive. He died of lung cancer on March 31, 1980.

Paula Hovater, an Atlanta public relations executive who has been a supporter of the project for several years, said the park will be an appropriate tribute to Owens.

"I hope this will be more than just a memorial. He was a wonderful track star and a great American. This project is the result of a lot of local people, black and white, rich and poor, coming together to make it happen," Ms. Hovater said.

Pinion said the torch will enter the park about 1:40 p.m. on June 29. Pinion said there will be a short program that will include a 10-minute presentation concerning the torch.

The torch will then head south toward Birmingham.

But organizers said that will be only the beginning for the park which they hope will lure thousands of visitors.

"Tourists are already coming by asking about it," said Allen Preston, an employee of Native Construction Co. of Moulton, which is doing most of the work on the park.

White said that in future years organizers hope to have annual track meets at the park, with competitions in the four events Owens won in Berlin.

"We are going to invite athletes from all over the state. We hope to develop scholarships from this. We want to show young people they have plenty to be proud of and plenty to shoot for," White said.

While organizers stress that the park will be "classy," they also stress that it will be free and open to anybody who wants to visit.

"Jesse Owens left here poor, and it just wouldn't be right to charge admission," White said.



Stephen Gates/Post-Herald

A replica of the home where Jesse Owens was born, to be placed in the park bearing his name, has yet to be installed at

its final site. The Jesse Owens Memorial Park is being built in Oakville in southeast Lawrence County.

# Oakville honors its Olympic hero

By Bob Johnson

Post-Herald Reporter

OAKVILLE — Much like the child who had the nerve to say the emperor was wearing no clothes, Jesse Owens let the world know Adolf Hitler's theory of Aryan supremacy was nonsense.

It was Owens' ability to run and jump that earned him four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. The victories by Owens and other young black Americans shattered Hitler's theory that white Germans were from a superior race and better athletes.

Efforts are now under way to honor Owens in a big way in the Gay north Alabama community where he spent the first nine years of his life. The Jesse Owens Memorial Park is being built on the same



ridge in Oakville in southeast Lawrence County where Owens' sharecropper parents once picked cotton.

Oakville was not even on most Alabama maps until about two years ago, but the world will know how to find Owens' hometown on

## Oakville

Oakville still looks much like it did when Jesse Owens was growing up there as a child.



John Bell/Post-Herald and a member of the park's board of directors.

The park, located on more than 38 acres just off Alabama 157, will include a museum, a replica of the small wooden home where Owens lived in Oakville and a gold medal court.

Please turn to OWENS, page A3

Community hero, page E1  
 Jesse Owens' hometown has changed over the past 80 years. Story, page E4

June 29, when the Olympic torch relay comes through Lawrence County and stops for the ceremony dedicating the Jesse Owens Memorial Park. During the ceremony Owens' widow, Ruth Owens, will unveil a life-size statue of Owens and the Jesse Olympian's grandson, Stuart Owens Rankin, will run the torch through the park.

"We feel like the world will know where Oakville, Ala., is after that day," said James Pinion, county agent for Lawrence County,