

The world comes to Oakville June 29

The world will arrive June 29.

On that Saturday, the XXVI Olympic torch, carried by some of our friends and

neighbors, will push its way to Oakville, the hometown of 1936 four-time Olympic gold medalist Jesse Owens.

Will Oakville be ready?

Will the Jesse Owens Memorial Park be complete?

"Yes. And, no," says park coordinator James Pinion. Faith and hope lead Pinion, and a committee of more than 35 others, to believe that the park and the day's program will be ready. For the most part.

At press time for this issue, the park was far from completion. But, Pinion and the workmen are making that six weeks of hard work will make a difference.

Pinion, who only a few months ago expressed concern about readying the park for the arrival of the torch, is pushing, pulling and organizing committees and work crews for the event.

"We will have enough here to be proud of."

It looks like much of the 17.5-acre park will be ready. Pinion has already collected more than \$1.4 million in grants and donations toward the park work and hopes to announce an additional grant in early June.

"We want this done right." After all, the world is already watching Lawrence County, says Pinion. The park has been featured in both *The Miami Herald* and the *Jacksonville (Fla.) News*. *The Wall Street Journal* has sent a reporter to scope out the plans and park. Plus, says Pinion, *CNN* is planning to cover the day's events.

So, how will the county celebrate the life and the accomplishments of one of its hometown heroes? With the unveiling of a larger-than-life size bronze statue, speeches, the Olympic torch, a flyover of Air Force jets and lots of games, storytelling, music and memorabilia.

It's assured the media will focus its camera on Owens' grandson, who hopes to take the Olympic torch through the Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville and help his grandmother light a permanent replica of the torch carried in the '36 Olympics. The torch will burn eternally in Oakville to welcome future visitors.

According to Owens' wife, Ruth, her grandson is her husband made over and it would be fitting to see him carry the torch.

At least, this is the scenario that park officials hope for. Once again, Pinion is trying to get a confirmation on whether Owens' grandson, Stewart Owens Rankin of

Boston, will be allowed to carry the torch. "We've gotten a verbal commitment, but I won't trust it until we get it in writing," says Pinion.

It's glitch after glitch and wait-and-see frustration for committee members and Pinion.

"I know that five years of hard work and planning will come together," adds Pinion, as he glances around the park grounds. Behind him, workers are renovating an old house to look like new. The white wood-framed home, with its wraparound porch, will be the welcome center. Pinion explains how wooden rockers and a porch swing at the center will remind visitors of our Southern heritage.

He also proudly points out the two rocks carved in the shape of the state of Alabama, one is set into the doorsteps and the other into the fireplace. Each of the rocks will have a spot to mark Oakville sandblasted onto it.

Across the field one can see the six new picnic pavilions. On the hill, the gold medalion court is in progress. An old tenant home which resembles Owens' homeplace, balances on a trailer bed waiting for its new foundation to be laid. Nearby, workers are placing string so concrete can be poured for the walkways. In the center, a huge, gaping hole filled with a concrete bed and steel rods awaits the bronze sculpture of Owens, crafted by Birmingham sculptor Branko Medencia.

Just a few yards away, the museum is in its beginning stages. For now there are only steel poles and a foundation with its water pipes and electrical conduits jutting out. Somehow, by June 29, this park will be a showcase.

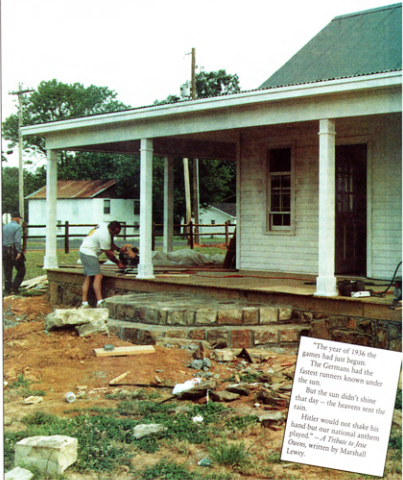
The welcome center will be ready, the Owens home will be in place, the statue will be mounted and ready to unveil, and the museum will be built. The gravel road that winds through the park and the parking lots will be paved, the soil will be laid, and the trees and shrubs will be planted.

There is no doubt that it will be complete, say the organizers.

Though the Owens museum will be built, it will not be open until late 1996.

See World page 7

Getting there



"The year of 1936 the games had just begun. The Germans had the fastest runners known under the sun. But the sun didn't shine that day - the heavens sent the rain. Hitler would not shake his hand but our national anthem played." - *A Tribute to Jesse Owens*, written by Marshall Lewis.