

Officials fine-tuning torch run plans

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OAKVILLE — Cindy Bowling didn't exactly "put her foot down" when she came here Tuesday to discuss the finer points of Olympic Torch Run preparations.

But the torch relay manager left her footprint in the dirt when she hurriedly left the Jesse Owens Memorial Park because of an early evening rain.

Ms. Bowling mapped strategy with park committee members for everything from hiding portable restrooms from television cameras to deciding what kind of signs concessionaires could display.

"I think this is going to be a very pristine event and it's going to be representative in many respects of the quality athlete Jesse Owens was and the respect that we all have for him," said Ms. Bowling, who came from Birmingham for the meeting with the Owens park committee. "I'm real pleased to be involved with it, and I know that the Atlanta Committee of the Olympic Torch Relay is delighted to bring the flame here."

Park Dedication Ceremony committee member Nita Mason presented Ms. Bowling with a list of 11 businesses that had applied for permission to operate at the event, which will take place in 17 days.

"All the businesses have to be privately owned and cannot be part of a chain," said Mrs. Mason. Her list was approved by Ms. Bowling, but applicants must meet these conditions: "They can't display signs naming their business, but they can display signs advertising the products they're selling."

Vendors will sell barbecue, hot dogs, hamburgers, T-shirts and nachos, among other foods. They will, however, be restricted to selling one beverage: Coca-Cola. Vendors will be required to purchase Coca-Cola from the distributor and sell it on site.

The only other beverage allowed is water — and not the bottled variety.

Activities scheduled for the June 29 dedication ceremony will include Owens' family's participation in a ribbon-cutting ceremony and the unveiling of a statue of the late Olympic hero. Owens was born in Oakville in 1913 and went on to win four gold medals in track and field in the 1936 Olympics.

With up to 20,000 people expected to attend the late June event, Mark Weems, district manager for Coca-Cola Atlanta, said one of the biggest things organizers are guilty of is under-estimating the significance of the Torch Relay to people and to the spirit of America.

"I say that to say what you all are doing is phenomenal with the (park) dedication, the relay and the family being here," he said. "I look at it not

only for what it means for that particular day, but what it means from that day forward. You know the torch has gone through a lot of communities, but after it's gone through the community, that's sort of it. But you all are going to have a way to remember the event from now on."

Weems said torch relay crowds have been huge and anything that can be done to advertise the event will help significantly. He said Coca-Cola has a public relations branch set up to help the local Owens task force.

"I'll be glad to find out who you all are working with and have that person get in contact with them and I think working together we've got the makings of an outstanding event," he said.

Joy Godsey of the Birmingham agency McMillan Associates said

her company is helping to coordinate the event in Oakville.

"We're just working in a helping capacity to assist the various committees with logistical concerns, programming the entertainment and anything that has to do with putting the festival together."

Ms. Godsey said she has contacted national media and hopes to have coverage on cable station and the Internet.

Local entertainment will be the home-grown variety and Rosemary Lewey said she hopes to have something for everyone.

"Nearly every community in Lawrence County is represented, all the way across," said Lewey, the entertainment coordinator. "There's going to be jazz, country, rock and roll, gospel and plays. One of the unique things we're going to have is children's activities. We're looking on getting some obstacle courses and mini-running clinics during the day. We're also going to have some softball games going on, maybe even some volleyball for the kids who get bored with this because a lot of people ride in early and stay late."