

Extension Helps Jesse Owens Park Become Reality

For the people of Oakville, Alabama, what began as a dream more than 13 years ago became a reality on June 29 when Jesse Owens Memorial Park was dedicated.

More than 60 years after the black American stunned Hitler and delighted the world by winning four gold medals in track and field at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Owens was honored by his hometown, and the world was there to see it.

News media from throughout the United States, 18 members of the Owens family and many others—more than 15,000 people—were on hand for the dedication festivities and the arrival of the Olympic Torch, which was carried through the park by Owens' only grandson Stuart Owen Rankin of Boston, Mass.

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System is well known for its efforts to assist agricultural producers and for its far-reaching 4-H programs. Perhaps less known is the fact that the System provides valuable assistance in economic and community resource development.

In 1991, Owens' cousin Marvin Fitzgerald and Therman White came to the Lawrence County Extension Office for help with a dream—to create a park honoring Jesse Owens, one of Lawrence County's greatest native sons. After talking with the men, the Lawrence County staff immediately began working to make the dream come true.

Accelerated by the selection of Atlanta as the site for the 1996 Summer Games and the hope that the Olympic Torch Relay could be routed through the park, Extension enlisted the help of Extension Tourism Specialist Tom Chesnutt. He created a development plan for the 19-acre park.

Led by County Extension Coordinator James Pinion, the Lawrence County team also helped the Jesse Owens Memorial Park Board raise more than \$1.5 million.

The feature attraction in the park is a statue of Owens striding through the Olympic rings. It was sculpted by Birmingham artist Branko Medenica. Mrs. Ruth Owens unveiled the statue of her husband and lit an eternal flame. The flame is a recreation of the 1936 Olympic torch.

Other park features include a visitors center, a replica of the home Owens lived in, a museum, a basketball court, a softball field and other recreational facilities.

The Park Board, Extension staff, 4-H'ers and volunteers worked many hours to get the park ready for the June 29 dedication and Olympic Torch Relay. Judging by the excitement of the people attending on dedication day, the workers' efforts were truly appreciated.

At the conclusion of the Park Dedication and Torch Relay ceremonies, Pinion, who was selected as a Community Hero Torchbearer by the Atlanta Committee on Olympic Games, and White, who was selected as an honorary Torch

Escort (the only one in the nation), together carried the torch out of the park.

Work is continuing at the park. Currently, the museum construction is in the latter stages, and the Park Board hopes to have the quarter-mile track and walking trail finished by December.

Besides teaching future generations about Owens and what he meant to international athletics and to American society, Extension believes Jesse Owens Memorial Park will provide recreational opportunities for Oakville and Lawrence County residents, and enhance tourism to bring more people and dollars to the county.



The center attraction at Jesse Owens Memorial Park is this statue of Owens striding through the Olympic rings.

Project Learning Tree Uses Forest As Window On The World

Project Learning Tree (PLT) is an environmental program that uses the forest as its center point or "window on the world." The program is presented to students in Pre-K through 8th grade to teach them about environmental issues and to increase their understanding of the environment. PLT helps students develop skills to make informed decisions on the environment. Students' increased awareness and understanding of environmental issues instill commitment to take responsible action on behalf of the environment.

Calhoun County Extension Agent David West is providing

facilitator training for PLT to other county agents in Alabama. In turn, these agents, who are certified after completing the training, will train other people in their counties. Each trained facilitator receives a handbook of lesson plans.

The training for PLT is presented in the spirit of a child. Trainees receive hands-on instructions and participate in lesson plans like the young people for whom the program is designed.

PLT is arranged under five major themes: Diversity, Interrelationships, Systems, Structure

Continued, PLT, Page 2