

Museum showcases video, record leap

By Ronnie Thomas
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OAKVILLE — Raising his tribute to the standard it will enjoy Saturday has been long and hard, nothing short of a Jesse Owens unning broad jump.

And James Pinion wants visitors to see literally just how much ground that leap covered — 26 feet, 11/4 inches.

Inside the Jesse Owens Museum, which is being dedicated Saturday, Pinion has marked off the distance near a giant photo of the star making the jump.

While the world's fondest memory of Owens remains the stylish way he snubbed Adolf Hitler by winning four gold medals in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the jump — a world record at the time — occurred May 25, 1935, at the Big 10 Championships in Ann Arbor, Mich.

On that day, in less than an hour, he also set two other world records and tied another as an Ohio State University athlete.

Still, Berlin brought out the most dramatic moments of Owens' career, many of which transcend athletics.

After Hitler refused to shake hands with America's first black medal winner of the Games, Ralph Metcalfe, the Nazi leader was told by the Olympic Committee to either greet all of the winners or none. To avoid what he said would have been an embarrassment — posing with a black — Hitler chose not to greet future winners.

But the German people admired Jesse Owens, including one of his competitors, Luz Long, who advised Owens on how to avoid stepping over the starting board and scratching in the broad jump.

Owens used the hint to qualify and then to defeat the German in the finals. Long was the first to congratulate him, and they walked shoulder to shoulder back down the jump path, in full view of Hitler.

When Owens received an invitation to mark the 15th anniversary of the Games in 1951, he raced around the track in his Olympic gear and was summoned to the box of the mayor.



DAILY Photo by Gary Cosby
James Pinion at museum display showing Jesse Owens at the Olympics with German Luz Long.

"Jesse Owens, Hitler would not greet you or shake your hand," the mayor said. "I will try to make up for that today by taking both hands."

And when Owens traveled to Berlin again in the early 1960s where a documentary, "Return to Berlin," was filmed in the old stadium, Luz Long's son, Kyle, who was born in 1941, was there to greet him. His father was killed fighting for Germany in 1943, during World War II.

During that film, which visitors to the museum will be able to view, Owens talks about the big ticker-tape parade in New York given for members of the Olympic team.

He recalls that at some point in the parade, a brown paper bag was tossed into his seat.

"I thought it was a sandwich or perhaps some fruit," he said, "and didn't think anymore about it at the time."

He kept the bag, and en route to Cleveland that night for another parade in his honor the following day, he opened it for the first time.

"Inside was about \$10,000 in cash to a family that was poor, a family from Alabama, given by people we did not know," Owens said. "It was such a big lift to the son of a sharecropper who was fortunate enough to win an Olympic gold medal."