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Museum dedicated during impressive ceremony

The Jesse Owens Museum was dedicated Saturday, May 16, during an impressive ceremony at the Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Lawrence County.

Located in Oakville, the birthplace of the late track star, this 30-acre park contains a welcome center, replica of the cabin where Jesse Owens lived as a child, the museum building, an impressive statue by Birmingham sculptor Branko Medenica and ballfields.

Future plans call for a track to be constructed on the grounds.

An impressive crowd attended the program which featured the cutting of a ribbon to officially open the museum facility. Ruth Owens, wife of the 1936 Olympics star, happily sliced the ribbon with scissors. Afterwards, hundreds of people went through the doors and into a place which effectively tells the story of Jesse Owens, "The Man Who Outran Hitler."

Mrs. Owens and most other family members reside in Ohio. They attended an event two years ago in Oakville when the sculpture was unveiled.

At that time, Stuart Rankin ran the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics Torch into the park.

Rankin, a grandson of Jesse and Ruth Owens, was unable to return for this occasion due to a prior commitment.

Jesse's brother, Sylvester Owens, was present.

Gloria Hemphill, Owens' oldest daughter, of Chicago, Ill., spoke on behalf of the family.

She expressed appreciation to those who worked on this project for the past 10 years.

Mrs. Hemphill also thanked local residents who accepted her and the rest of Jesse Owens' family as "one of you."

one at his mother's house in Cleveland, Ohio, one at Rhodes High School in Cleveland where he used the track to practice, one on All American Row at his Alma Mater, Ohio State University, and unfortunately, the fourth seedling died.

"Today, 62 years later, the tree will be replaced in the Jesse Owens Memorial Park by the Jesse Owens family.

"May the tree grow to the honor of Jesse Owens' virtues and achievements."



GLORIA HEMPHILL - Speaking on behalf of the family was Jesse Owens' daughter, Gloria Hemphill, of Chicago.



IN OAKVILLE MAY 16 - Sylvester Owens, a resident of Ohio, is the brother of Jesse Owens. He is shown with Georgia Carter Turner, executive director of the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association. They were among those who attended the ceremony to dedicate the new Jesse Owens Museum at Jesse Owens Memorial Park. Turner said the park is already a major attraction for the region and will be an even greater draw now that the museum is open.

She called the museum a "celebration of a champion and a master of the spirit as well as the mechanics of the sport. His faith in America has inspired countless others to do their best for their family and their country."

After all remarks were made and the ribbon was cut, the family planted an oak tree near the statue.

James Pinion, Lawrence County Extension Service coordinator, has been active in this endeavor since the first day. He explained the significance of the Jesse Owens Gold Medal Oaks:

"During Berlin's 1936 Olympic Games, seedling oaks were awarded to each gold medalist and each gold medalist team member.

"On Aug. 9, 1936, Jesse Owens received four gold medals and four oak seedlings.

"In the film, *Return To Berlin*, narrated by Jesse Owens and featured in the museum theater, he said that he planted



RUTH OWENS CUTS RIBBON TO OFFICIALLY OPEN MUSEUM - The widow of Jesse Owens cut the ribbon Saturday, May 16, to officially open the Jesse Owens Museum in Oakville, a community eight miles east of Moulton. Owens was born here in 1913. He died in 1980. A crew from ESPN Television taped the entire dedication ceremony for broadcast at a later date.

A place you should visit

Jesse Owens Memorial Park is a wonderful place to visit. Exact hours the museum will be open may be obtained by calling (256) 974-3636.



BRANKO MEDENICA - A resident of Mountain Brook, Branko Medenica owns a studio, Sculpture Sight, at 417 25th Street South, Birmingham. He created this beautiful statue of Jesse Owens running through the Olympic rings. It was unveiled in 1996 at the Jesse Owens Memorial Park.