

Lawrence won't let Owens Park close, won't give extra funds

By Clyde L. Stancil
DAILY Staff Writer

MOULTON — Two of the people most responsible for establishing Jesse Owens Park admonished Lawrence County commissioners for not providing enough funds to operate the park's museum for a year.

Owens Park board member Thurman White and former board member James Pinion sought answers from commissioners who voted against providing the museum with the necessary operating funds for the year. They discussed the funding in a Friday continued meeting where commissioners approved the fiscal year 2000-2001 budget.

White and Pinion received a verbal commitment that the commission would not allow the park to close. Commissioners said they said would

seek state funds. But they did not say that they would increase the funds that the Owens Park board will need to operate if the state does not come through.

The budget includes \$4,000 each for the Owens Park and the three other county-owned parks. The Owens Park museum needs about \$9,000 a year to pay its utility bills.

"I know two things for sure," said Pinion. "When money is not the issue, I can't understand why that decision was made. We'll close in January. The second is; Hitler would be proud of that decision"

Owens, a black track and field athlete who was born near the park site in Oakville, spoiled German leader Adolf Hitler's theory of Aryan supremacy by winning four gold medals in the 1936 Berlin Olympics.



James Pinion
"Hitler would be proud"



Thurman White
Owens board member

White asked the commissioners to explain how they could justify giving the park the limited amount. He said the other parks (except the Oakville Indian Mounds and Museum) operate ball fields about four months a year, while the Owens museum operates 12 months.

"What will you do about the other eight months that the other people are shut down and still collecting their money?" asked White. "I'm having a problem with that. . . . You mean to tell me that you have \$1 million in the bank and (won't give us \$9,000). If I had you hired, I'd fire every one of you. I don't hate you. I think you're good-hearted people. . . . If you don't think you're being used, you're backing up. You're being laughed at."

White was referring to what appears to be an effort by an unnamed group of citizens to shut down Owens Park. He said that he is sure most of their constituents don't support their decision.

Chairman Bradley Cross and Commissioners Barley Lentz and Hutson Parker have maintained throughout the discussions that they should be supported along district lines. Parker initially wanted to budget \$25,000 for parks to be divided among each commission district.

The 2000-2001 solid waste budget shows revenues of \$1,256,500, and expenditures of \$1,177,355. That will leave a year-ending balance of \$79,145. But the figures do not include \$940,000 in certificates of deposit, and \$200,000 in a liquid account. Both amounts are part of the total solid waste fund.

Cross, Lentz and Parker voted against District 4 Commissioner Randall LouAllen's motion to increase the \$4,000 allotments to \$8,000. The three said at a Wednesday work session there is not a concerted race-based effort among white Lawrence County citizens to shut down the Owens Park.

District 1 Commissioner Mose Jones, who supported LouAllen's motion to increase park funding, said he thinks the problem is not a lack of money, as some of the commissioners' claim.

Some of these commissioners and people in their districts care anything about Jesse Owens Park, you're not going to get it. "I know the commissioners said they want to give to us equally. But when you look at one of the largest things in Lawrence County. Nobody is coming here to see Veterans Memorial Park. Maybe this body is want Jesse Owens Park to be to park. Maybe their embar-

Lawrence County Attorney Cecil Caine said the point that has not been stressed is that Lawrence County built Jesse Owens Park.

"We don't get enough credit for it," he said.

Lentz agreed with Cross' suggestion to seek state funds.

"We're not going to let Jesse Owens close, we're not going to let any of them (county parks) close," he said. "This is the first year that we've funded any of them, so we're making progress. \$4,000 will get you to February. We're not going to let you close."

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