

# Owens' memory honored with historical marker

By Tom Smith  
REGIONAL BUREAU CHIEF

OAKVILLE — Rep. Jody Letson said there's only one word that can describe Jesse Owens — hero.

"The dictionary defines a hero as an illustrious warrior; a man admired for his achievements and noble qualities; one that shows great courage; the central figure in an event, period of movements — Jesse Owens fits this definition," said Letson, D-Hillsboro.

During a brief ceremony Sunday afternoon in the shadows of the Jesse Owens Museum, a historical marker was unveiled honoring Lawrence County's most famous native.

"It was an honor for us to participate in this project," said Dr. Robert Rhyne Jr., president of the Lawrence County Historical Commission.

The Lawrence County Historical Commission donated the historical marker to the Owens Park and Museum board. Owens lived in Lawrence County until his was 9 when his family moved to Cleveland, Ohio.

In the 1936 Summer Olympics in Germany, Owens won four gold medals. He won the 100-meter dash, the 200-

meter dash, the long jump and was a member of the 400-meter relay team.

After his wins, Adolph Hitler would not recognize Owens for his accomplishments. However, when he returned to the United States, he received a hero's welcome.

"During the 1936 Hitler Olympics, Jesse Owens not only competed against the greatest athletes in the world, but against the biggest racist the world has ever known," Letson said to about 60 people who attended the ceremony. "The next time you are looking for a true hero, look no further than your own back yard, Oakville — the birthplace of Jesse Owens."

Therman White, a member of the park board, and Lawrence County Commissioner Randall LouAllen accepted the marker for the park.

"We appreciate the effort of everyone that made this possible," White said. "This marker is going to be a great addition to the park."

The Associated Press in 1950 named Owens the Greatest Track and Field Athlete in History.

In 1956, President Dwight Eisenhower appointed Owens to serve as his representative in the 1956 Summer

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Olympics that were held in Melbourne, Australia.

"It's only fitting we honor Owens today as the world watches the 2000 Summer Olympics in Australia," Letson said.

The historical marker will be placed at the entrance of the park and museum. The park is at the intersection of Lawrence 187 and Lawrence 203 in the Oakville community near where Owens was born.

The park is home to a museum that houses memorabilia of Owens' life. Also in the museum are two recently donated oil paintings of Owens.

Atlantic Richfield Co., which sponsored the Jesse Owens Games youth track and field program from 1964-94, donated the paintings and other memorabilia to the museum.

"It's our pleasure to be able to donate these paintings and other memorabilia to the museum," said Seymour Satin, ARCO/BP Information resource center manager.

"The games' slogan 'Everyone's A Winner' epitomized Jesse's philosophy that by taking part in the program, a youngster was a winner by simply making that first step.

"He never missed an opportunity to kneel down at eye level to talk with an unsuccessful, disappointed participant about the importance of having taken part.

"He had a tremendous impact on the lives of millions and millions of young people across this country."

LouAllen, whose district includes the Oakville area, said Owens was indeed a hero.

"He had a saying 'In America, anybody can be somebody,'" LouAllen said. "I believe that, and he lived to prove that is true.

"Lawrence County is proud of him."



DANIEL GILES/TimesDaily

Therman White looks at the new historical marker unveiled Sunday at the Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville, the Olympian's birthplace.