

# TimesDaily

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## Pinion: Owens park needs more money

### County allowance doesn't pay utilities

By Tom Smith  
REGIONAL BUREAU CHIEF

MOULTON - A member of the Jesse Owens park and Museum board says the park may close unless it gets more money from the Lawrence County Commission.

"We try to do all we can with the money we get, from keeping the park looking good to trying to promote it," James Pinion said. "But our

expenses take up just about all of the money we get."

In the recently adopted 2001 budget, the commission appropriated \$16,000 for the four county-owned parks: Owens park, Indian Mound Park in Oakville, Veterans Memorial Park in East Lawrence and Red Bank Park north of Town Creek.

Owens park, named in honor of the Olympic champion and Lawrence County native, is at the intersection of Lawrence 187 and Lawrence 203 in the Oakville community.

Owens lived in Lawrence Coun-

ty until he was 9, when his family moved to Cleveland. He became a national hero when he won four gold medals in the 1936 Summer Olympics in Germany.

Commissioners said each of the four parks would get \$4,000.

If that is all the money Owens park gets, it will close at the end of February, Pinion said.

"They gave us \$4,000 to operate the park. Our utility bill is averaging \$9,000 a year," Pinion said. "It's obvious that isn't enough money to operate."

Pinion said the county has paid

*MUSEUM continued on 6A*

## MUSEUM: Park needs money to stay open

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the utility bill since the park opened two years ago.

In addition to the money from the county, the park also will receive \$12,500 from the United Way of Lawrence County to help with maintenance and upkeep expenses.

"When you think of having to buy items to resell in the museum as well as the upkeep and maintenance, it's costly," Pinion said.

Proceeds from admission charges to the museum and the sale of souvenirs also go to the park.

County Commission Chairman Bradley Cross said the commission wants to be fair to all four county parks. "We tried to make everything equal," Cross said. "We own three other parks and it was only fair that we give each of the other parks the same amount."

But Pinion said Owens park is different. Those differences should be taken into consideration when it comes to funding, he said.

"The other parks are mostly for youth activities, which is fine," he said. "They don't have a museum, which along with the replica of Owens' birthplace, are the main attractions here. Plus, we operate year-round; the other parks don't."

The park has attracted visitors from throughout the world.

"This is a tourist attraction. All parks are different and we have a different purpose from the other parks," Pinion said. "The purpose of this park is to educate the people about Jesse Owens. It's that name, Jesse Owens, that brings people to this park, not recreation."

Two county commissioners agree with Pinion. During the budget meeting, Commissioners Mose Jones Jr. and Randall LouAllen voted to amend the budget to increase Owens park's allocation to \$9,000.

But their motion failed.

"In my opinion, the parks should be funded based on need," LouAllen said. "If we're going to own the park, then the county should take the responsibility of paying the bills."

Cross said the Commission wouldn't let the park close.

"We can always go back and look at the funding again," he said. "We wanted to be fair to each of the facilities and that's what we tried to do with our park money."

Meanwhile, Pinion said the park board would seek grants and state money to keep the park open.

State Rep. Jody Letson, D-Hillsboro, said he is willing to see if there is any state money available.

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Exhibits on display at the Jesse Owens Museum in Oakville in Lawrence County offer scenes from the Olympian's life and honors.