

## RIVERFRONT

Thursday, October 27, 2005



DAILY Photo by Emily Saunders

James Pinion lights the torch outside the Jesse Owens museum. Pinion has been instrumental in raising funds to improve the park.

## Jesse Owens Memorial Park to make appearance on ESPN's 'Cold Pizza'

By Clyde L. Stancil

DAILY Staff Writer  
cstancil@decaturdaily.com • 340-2443

OAKVILLE — Chris Epting finds the Jesse Owens story compelling.

A historian and author of seven books, Epting not only finds the Oakville native's 1936 Olympic feats amazing, what has transpired in the last 10 years is also,

though many people don't know what it is, he said of the creation of the Jesse Owens museum in Oakville.

Known as a pop culture historian, Epting was in Oakville on Wednesday and will be there today when television crews descend on the Jesse Owens Memorial Park and Museum. An appearance on ESPN's "Cold Pizza" morning show and

others should tell the nation about the museum that is dedicated to the four-time Olympic champion in his birthplace.

"You know people will see that and say, 'I never knew there was a Jesse Owens Museum,'" Epting said. "There are not many museums dedicated to specific

Please see **Owens**, page B2

## Owens

Continued from page B1

athletes. It's very unusual. You may see a landmark."

Owens' daughters Marlene Owens Rankin and Gloria Owens Hemphill will attend the 10 a.m. presentation of a check from Hampton Hotels, which is donating the money through its Save-A-Landmark Program.

The event is from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The volunteers who painted the visitor center, replaced the sign in front and landscaped the park Wednesday were from area Hampton Inns. Cameron said the hotel chain uses staff from nearby hotels so they can feel a kinship with the landmark.

At \$38,200, the grant is the largest the chain has provided to refurbish 25 landmarks. Save-A-Landmark workers found the Jesse Owens Park and Museum while looking for a way to tie the program into the 2006 and 2008 Olympic Games. Hilton Hotels owner of Hampton Inns, is a sponsor of the upcoming Olympics.

Park treasurer James Pinion submitted the information for the grant, which will significantly change the look of the park. Young oaks with their roots still enclosed in sacks Wednesday lined the road from the park's entrance to the museum. Hampton Inn volunteers will plant them, and once they grow, the trees will create a guide along the winding road for visitors.

A batch of evergreen Leyland



DAILY Photo by Emily Saunders

Hoseylee Taylor, a part-time employee, rakes the model pit at Jesse Owens Memorial Park. The distance Owens jumped is marked on the long-jump pit. Visitors to the park can try to make the jump, but always come up short.

Cypress trees will grow tall and thick enough to block a visitor's view of the homes, animal pens and other buildings surrounding the park, giving it a feel of sitting by itself. Pinion said he hired contractors to do much of the work from the Landmark grant, and the volunteers will compliment that effort. They will help Branko Medenica polish the statue of Jesse Owens in front of the museum.

Medenica sculpted the statue in the 1990s. There will be repairs to the roof of the replica of the dogtrot cabin in which Owens was born. Contractors

used some of the money to widen the distance between the three flagpoles at the museum.

Pinion and then-board member Thurman White oversaw improvements before they received the grant. Pinion's wife Nancy and Curtis and Joyce Cole worked on those projects. There is new playground equipment, new interpretive kiosks that tell the Jesse Owens story, two new computers for the museum's resource center and a Web site, [www.jesseowens.org](http://www.jesseowens.org), that will be revamped by next week.

A federal grant has provided

lighting for the existing ballfield and the construction and lighting of another one.

Pinion is proud of the replica long jump pit made of the same material as the one Owens used for his Olympic-winning and world record jump in the 1936 Berlin Games. Visitors to the park have tried to equal Owens' jump of more than 26 feet.

"I've seen people get maybe right along in here," he said pointing to the 16-foot marker. "It's one thing to read about a 26-foot jump, but you can actually see the distance when you come out here."