

# Hotel cleans up Jesse Owens museum and park

Director seeks to build running track at site

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OAKVILLE — Workers with a hotel chain converged Thursday with soap-filled buckets, paint and their muscles for a make-over of the park and museum that honor Lawrence County native and Olympic great Jesse Owens.

Among the tasks the 20 Hampton Inn workers tackled were landscaping and painting the visitor center, at the gate of the 40-acre park.

"It's really going to change the complexion of the whole park," said James Pinion, coordinator at the park.

In all, more than \$38,000 is being spent by Hampton Hotel's "Save-A-Landmark" campaign, said Judy Christa, vice president of brand marketing for Hampton. The money also is paying for more than 150 trees and shrubs, repairs to a replica of Owens' boyhood home, and a new sign at the park entrance.

"I hope this creates more visibility for the park," Christa said.

This is the 25th landmark the five-year-old Hampton Hotel program has targeted for a



**Above:** Judy Christa of Memphis and vice president for marketing for Hampton Inn applies a layer of wax to the Jesse Owens statue. **Right:** Hampton Inn employees Annette Barber of Molton, left, and Lynn Teague of Decatur plant a tree as part of the museum's cleanup.

makeover. The landmarks are either historical in nature or are considered "quirky" side trips, such as the world's largest Santa Claus, in North Pole, Alaska.

"I wish more corporations would accept this kind of responsibility," said Branko Medenica, the Birmingham man who sculpted the large bronze statue of Owens that sits in front of the

museum. He and Hampton workers cleaned and polished the statue Thursday to prepare it for a new coat of wax.

Owens' three daughters, Gloria Hemphill, Beverly Prather and Marlene Rankin, all of Chicago, came to the event Thursday.

"Thanks for thinking of Daddy," Prather said.

Owens, whose family left Oakville when he was nine, is most remembered for winning four gold medals and setting or tying four world or Olympic records in track and field events during the 1936 Olympics in Germany.

Oakville-area residents got together in the early 1990s to buy the land and create a park and museum to honor the home-



town native. Pinion said the park has achieved all but one of its original goals in a 10-year-plan. It has not established a place to host track and field events.

About \$250,000 will be needed to build the track, 3,000-seat bleachers and concession stands, Pinion said.

To help raise money, Pinion hopes to use film of the 1936 Olympics that was sent to the museum by a woman in Texas about a year ago. The film contains footage of the games, including showing Hitler and the Hindenburg blimp that would go down in flames during a trip to the United States the following year, he said.

Pinion said he hopes the track facility could be used for high

school and intercollegiate events, including some special events that would honor Owens.

The top U.S. Olympic official also said Thursday he hoped his group could work with the park on youth sports programs in the future.

Lt. Gen. Wallace "Chip" Gregson, the new COO of the U.S. Olympic Committee, said he went to Oakville to signal the committee's support of the park and museum. "It really is important to memorialize his achievements and this park is exceptionally well done, and I think it will help to educate people, generations of Americans, about all the special things he did," he said.