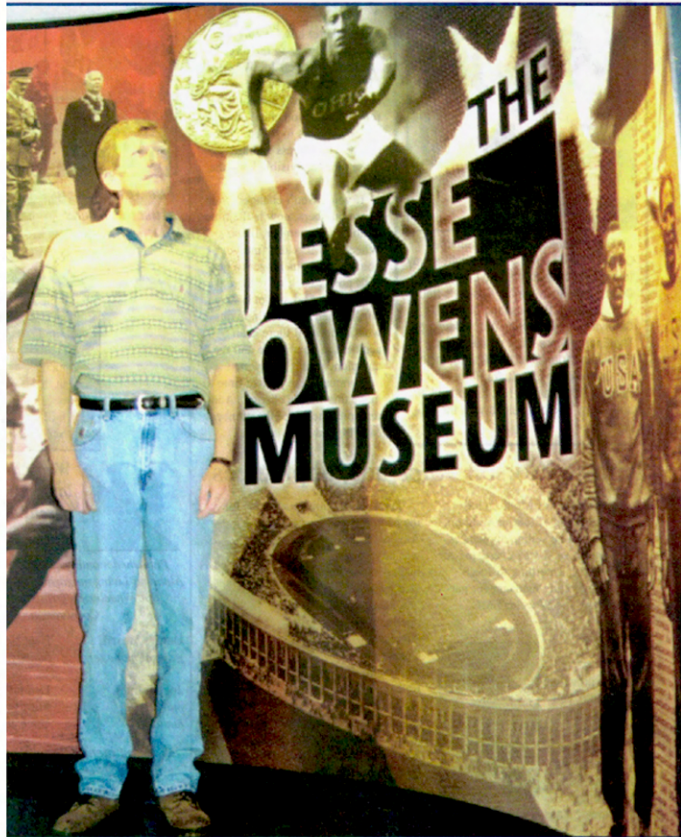


Dream of Owens museum fulfilled at Oakville park



Despite the cameras and the throng of welcoming officials, for a few moments Ruth Owens recaptures the life she shared with her husband Jesse as she walks through the museum. The display entitled Jesse and Ruth momentarily brought the 83-year-old to tears as she read about their elopement.

Seated in a chair near the entrance to the museum, Ruth Owens caught her breath, leaned forward in her chair, and whispered.

"This is beautiful. So special. I want to come back by myself so I can really see it," the 83-year-old said wistfully as she rested following a guided tour of the newly opened museum. "I want to read everything. I want to take my time..."

Time to remember. Time to experience. That's exactly what the Jesse Owens Museum asks of its visitors.

The museum, which is located at the Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville, is about more than the four gold medals Jesse Owens

won at the 1936 Olympic. It is about the man: his courage and his dreams. It is also about the dreams of a community which has worked diligently to build this tribute.

Of course there is plenty of information about the medals in the museum. But, there are also pictorials of Owens' life and displays filled with memorabilia donated by the family. One display holds a 1936 Olympic program and a camera used by Owens at the games.

Design Display of Birmingham developed the exhibits, relating the chapters of Owens' life to his career as athlete and as humanitarian.

The time panels take visitors through the highlights by year, beginning with Owens' birth in Oakville on Sept. 12, 1913 and ending with his death in Chicago in 1980.

There is also a 45-minute film narrated by Owens of his experience at the Olympics which includes footage shot at Reich Feild in Germany, the site of the 1936 games.

James Pinion, one of the park organizers, stands before the pictorial tribute to Owens which welcomes visitors at the entrance to the museum.

The film includes conversations with Owens and Kyle Long, the son of German athlete Luz Long who befriended Owens at the '36 Olympics. The well-known photo of Long and Owens lying in the grass is displayed several times in the museum, once as a full-wall mural. Many of the photographs in the museum are life-size and draw the viewer into the scene.

And museum officials didn't cut out the humiliating parts of Owens' life. Despite his commitment to spreading goodwill worldwide, Owens had a difficult time making a living. There are photos of him racing horses, baseball players and men riding in buggies pulled by horses.

But there are photos, too, of Owens with Boy Scouts and civic leaders.

According to James Pinion, one of the park and museum organizers, the museum shows the five stages of Owens' life, from Oakville to Cleveland to Ohio State to the Olympics to life after the Olympics. "We've tried to cover every aspect," said Pinion. "It's a shame but people don't know that he spent his entire life helping others."

The park board spent two years collecting memorabilia for the museum. Some of the items, such as the uniforms Owens wore at the Olympics, at Ohio State and in high school, are replicas. There are no replicas of the gold medals, however, because the International Olympic Committee denied the museum's request to make them. But Pinion hopes some day the committee will change its mind; he knows the park board will not give up.

What began as a dream for many of residents of the tiny community of Oakville has finally become the reality of a park and a museum to honor its most famous citizen.

By Lynnette B. Madison

"I want to read everything. I want to take my time..."

Ruth Owens, wife of Olympic champion Jesse Owens