

## Park project

### Jesse Owens memorial gets facelift

By Jonathan Willis  
REGIONAL BUREAU

**A**t first, the thought of spending her free time planting shrubs and cleaning the grounds of an area more than 30 miles from home didn't sound too appealing to Amanda Woods.

But the Decatur resident is glad that she volunteered her time.

Woods joined more than 20 employees of various Hampton Hotels at the Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville this week for Hampton's save-a-landmark program.

The program raises money and support from volunteers to refurbish and clean monuments across the country, such as the one built in honor of the Lawrence County native and Olympic champion.

"Landmarks such as these are important to Americans," said Judy Christa, vice president of marketing for Hampton Hotels. "A survey was conducted that found that nine out of 10 Americans care about monuments and what they stand for."

The Jesse Owens Memorial Park seemed to be a perfect fit for the company because it is now an official sponsor of the 2006 and 2008 U.S. Olympic teams.

"I can't think of a better time to do this," said Wallace "Chip" Gregson, chief operating officer of the U.S. Olympic committee.

Owens became the first American to win four gold medals in track and field during a stunning performance at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. The Oakville park honors Owens with a statue, Olympic rings and museum.

"I would say he was the greatest athlete that there's ever been, regardless of the sport," said James Pinion, who coordinates park attractions.

Pinion's goal of adding to the park received some help Thursday in the form of a \$38,240 check from Hampton Hotels.

"I hope we can add a track down here soon," Pinion said. "That is the

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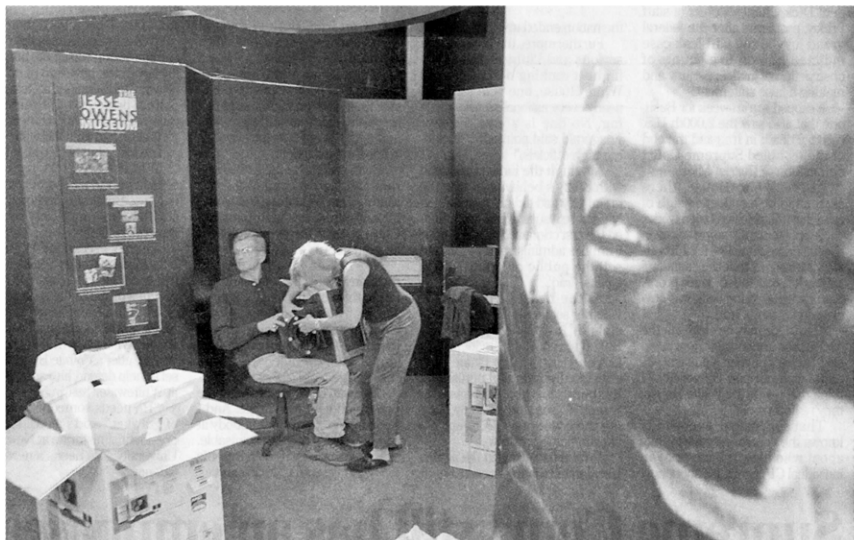


MATT MAJEAN/TimesDaily  
The statue of Jesse Owens, at the Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville, is being cleaned as part of the save-a-landmark program.



MATT MAJEAN/TimesDaily

Work goes on both inside and outside at the Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville.



James and Nancy Pinion install computers inside the Jesse Owens museum in Oakville. The Hampton Inn Corp. has donated almost \$40,000 to renovate the center and park.

## PARK: Owens remembered as a champion

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only thing that we haven't gotten done that I had hoped we would."

Owens' three daughters were in attendance Thursday morning to review the work that had been completed by volunteers.

"It really means a lot to know

that he's still remembered for the person he was," Gloria Owens Hemphill said. "If everyone carried daddy's attitude, the world would be a better place."

Marlene Owens Rankin said the park is special to her family, and she appreciates the support

and care that is given by the local community.

Gregson took that a step farther.

"His contributions to the world were immeasurable," he said, "especially at the time he did it and the odds that he faced."

Beverly Owens Prather said her father's legacy would live on through the park and the world.

"He was a champion of the spirit as well as of the sport," she said.