



FREEPOD

The news you've been missing.

Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Becky Connors...

And I'm Tim Connors...

In this week's episode, Freeporters kept more than 10 tons of electronic waste out of landfills...

A plan for keeping northwest Illinois streets safer is underway...

And a fan favorite returns for this year's Stephenson County Fair.

This is Freepod for July 2nd, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

ELECTRONIC RECYCLING EVENT BRINGS IN MORE THAN 20,000 POUNDS OF WASTE

Freeport residents kept more than 10 tons of electronic waste out of local landfills during the city's electronics recycling event last month.

City officials say a total of 20,894 pounds of e-waste was collected during the June 6th event, including more than 13,700 pounds of old televisions alone. The annual collection gives residents a safe and legal way to dispose of electronics that can't be thrown away with regular household garbage under Illinois law.



Items accepted included televisions, computer towers, laptops, printers, gaming systems, DVD players, keyboards, and other electronic devices. The city says the event also helps reduce illegal dumping and protects the environment by ensuring hazardous materials are properly recycled.

Residents who missed the event can still recycle electronics year-round through Keep Northern Illinois Beautiful recycling centers, although some items may require a recycling fee.



KUBERSKI NAMED PRESIDENT EMERITUS OF HIGHLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Highland Community College Board of Trustees has honored retiring President Chris Kuberski with the title of President Emeritus.

The recognition comes as Kuberski retired June 30th following a distinguished career of more than 40 years in higher education. She served as Highland's president since July 2020 after five years as executive vice president. During her tenure, the college strengthened its focus on student success, workforce development, and its core cultural values of Rise Up, Open Up, Own It, Be Bold, and One HCC.

The President Emeritus title recognizes Kuberski's outstanding service and allows her to maintain an ongoing relationship with the college in retirement. Highland officially welcomed Dr. Jamal Scott as its new president, marking the beginning of the institution's next chapter.

You can hear directly from Chris, Jamal, and HCC Board Chair Doug Block by going to our website and listening to their interview with Freepod's own Alan Wenzel.

PEARL CITY NAMES NEW SUPERINTENDENT

Pearl City School District has selected its next superintendent.

The school board announced that Brent Chrisman will become superintendent beginning July 1st, 2027. Chrisman has served as a district principal for the past seven years and will continue as principal while also taking on the superintendent's responsibilities in a dual-capacity leadership role. The district says the transition is designed to provide continuity for students, staff, and the community as current Superintendent Mike Schiffman prepares to step down.



In a message to the community, district leaders praised Chrisman's commitment to Pearl City schools and expressed confidence in his vision for the district's future. Chrisman will officially assume the superintendent's duties at the start of the 2027-2028 school year.



FREEPORT ART MUSEUM PREVIEWS FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT GRANT PROJECT

Downtown Freeport is getting another boost through the city's 2026 Façade Improvement Grant program.

Among the seven projects receiving funding is the Freeport Art Museum at 22 East Exchange Street. Planned renovations include a new main entrance, updated doors and windows, and a new entrance canopy as part of the museum's ongoing transformation. City officials say the improvements will help preserve one of downtown's historic properties while creating a more welcoming destination expected to increase foot traffic and support nearby businesses.

The Façade Improvement Grant program is designed to encourage private investment, strengthen downtown revitalization efforts, and enhance the appearance of commercial buildings throughout Freeport's historic business district.

NORTHWEST ILLINOIS SAFE STREETS PLAN MOVING FORWARD

A regional effort to make roads safer across northwest Illinois is moving ahead.

The Northwest Illinois Safe Streets for All Safety Action Plan is entering its final stages, bringing together Carroll, Jo Daviess, Lee, Ogle, Stephenson, and Whiteside counties to identify ways to reduce traffic deaths and serious injuries. The plan, led by the Blackhawk Hills Regional Council with support from a federal Safe Streets and Roads



for All grant, will help prioritize future improvements such as safer intersections, pedestrian and bicycle access, roadway design changes, and other proven safety measures.

Once finalized, the action plan will also position local governments to compete for future federal implementation grants, helping bring additional transportation safety funding to communities across northwest Illinois.



AREA FARMERS OPTIMISTIC AFTER JUNE RAINFALL

June rainfall is giving farmers across northern Illinois renewed optimism as the growing season enters a critical stretch.

After a dry start to the season, timely rains throughout June have improved soil moisture and helped corn and soybean crops make strong progress across northwest Illinois, including Stephenson, Jo Daviess, Carroll, and Ogle counties. Farmers say the moisture arrived at a crucial stage for crop development, easing stress on young plants and improving yield potential.

While growers will still need favorable weather through the rest of the summer, many say the recent rainfall has significantly improved field conditions and boosted confidence heading into July. Agricultural experts continue to monitor crops, noting that consistent rainfall and moderate temperatures will remain key to a successful harvest.

3 INJURED IN GRAND DETOUR BRIDGE CRASH

Three people were injured following a multi-vehicle crash on the Grand Detour Bridge in Ogle County.

The Ogle County Sheriff's Office says the crash happened on Illinois Route 2 when a southbound vehicle driven by a 69-year-old Oregon man allegedly crossed into the northbound lane. Investigators say a northbound SUV swerved to avoid a head-on collision but was struck, sending it into a guardrail before it collided with a second vehicle.



Three people were taken to an area hospital with minor injuries. The bridge was temporarily closed while emergency crews responded and cleared the scene. The driver accused of crossing the center line was cited for improper lane usage, failure to reduce speed to avoid an accident, and additional traffic violations.



ILLINOIS ROUTE 2 ROADWORK UNDERWAY IN OGLE COUNTY

Drivers in Ogle County should continue to watch for delays along Illinois Route 2 as transportation improvement projects move forward.

Maintenance work continues on the Grand Detour Bridge, where motorists may encounter temporary lane restrictions while crews complete repairs designed to extend the life of the historic crossing over the Rock River. Meanwhile, the Illinois Department of Transportation is continuing engineering and environmental work on the Route 2 corridor between Byron and Rockford. That long-term project includes proposed safety improvements such as wider shoulders, passing lanes, straighter curves, and accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians.

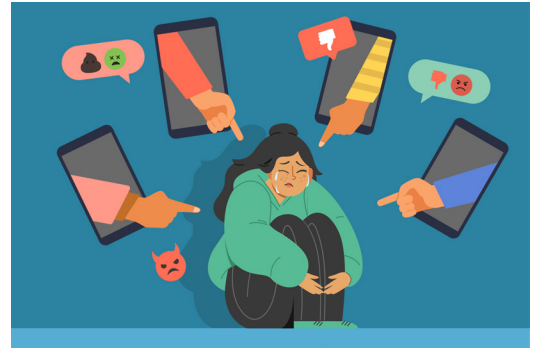
While construction on the Byron-to-Rockford corridor is still several years away, drivers are encouraged to slow down, obey work zone signs, and expect occasional delays through active construction areas.

CYBERBULLYING NOW INCLUDES AI IMAGES

A new Illinois law that took effect July 1st expands protections against cyberbullying by addressing the growing misuse of artificial intelligence in schools.

House Bill 3851 updates the state's definition of cyberbullying to include AI-generated explicit or harmful images of students. Lawmakers say the change gives school districts clearer authority to investigate and respond when online behavior disrupts a student's education, even if the incident happens off campus.

State Senator Steve Stadelman says AI technology has created new safety concerns, while Senator Li Arellano Jr. says the goal is to prevent bullying before it escalates into more serious situations. Parents are also encouraged to talk with their children about online safety and reporting digital harassment early.



NEW LAWS REGARDING RENEWING DRIVER'S LICENSES FOR ELDERLY DRIVERS

Another new law effective July 1st changes license renewal rules for older drivers.

Under the Road Safety and Fairness Act, drivers will no longer be required to take a driving test beginning at age 79. Instead, only motorists age 87 and older will need an annual behind-the-wheel driving test to renew their license. Drivers ages 79 and up must still pass a vision exam, and those with traffic violations may also be required to take a written test.

The law also creates a process allowing immediate family members to report concerns about a loved one's cognitive or physical ability to drive. State data shows drivers 75 and older are involved in the fewest crashes of any age group, helping build bipartisan support for the legislation.

REGENERATIVE AG GETS NEW FOCUS IN ILLINOIS

Regenerative agriculture is gaining momentum across Illinois, with new research, education, and conservation efforts reaching farmers in northwest Illinois.

The University of Illinois' I-Regen initiative is expanding partnerships to promote practices such as cover crops, reduced tillage, crop diversity, and improved grazing management. Supporters say these techniques can improve soil health, reduce erosion, conserve water, and make farms more resilient during both drought and heavy rainfall.



For farmers in counties like Jo Daviess, Carroll, Stephenson, and Ogle, where agriculture remains a cornerstone of the local economy, regenerative practices are drawing increasing interest as producers look for ways to protect productivity while reducing long-term input costs. University of Illinois Extension says the goal is to help farms remain both environmentally and economically sustainable for generations to come.



site.

MUSIC ON CHICAGO THIS WEEKEND

Looking for a way to kick off your Independence Day weekend? Music on Chicago returns to downtown Freeport on Thursday, July 3rd.

The Greater Freeport Partnership is hosting the outdoor concert at the FAM Arts Plaza, 11 to 15 East Douglas Street. Gates open at 5 p.m., with live performances by Synergy Band and The Real Deal. Admission is a \$5 donation, while children ages five and under get in free. Food trucks and beverages will also be available on

Music on Chicago is one of the Greater Freeport Partnership’s signature summer events, bringing live entertainment, local vendors, and visitors together to support downtown businesses and create a vibrant community gathering in the heart of Freeport.

WHERE TO SEE FIREWORKS LOCALLY

If you’re looking for fireworks this Independence Day week, you’ll have plenty of options close to home.

On Thursday, July 2nd, Cedarville kicks off the celebration with its annual fireworks display. Friday, July 3rd, head to downtown Freeport for Music on Chicago before enjoying the city’s fireworks at Krape Park that evening. Galena will also light up the sky on July 3rd with its annual fireworks display at the fairgrounds.



On Saturday, July 4th, Stockton wraps up its Independence Day festival with fireworks after a full day of family activities. Nearby communities including Rockford, DeKalb, and Dubuque will also host July Fourth displays. Before heading out, organizers encourage everyone to check local event pages or municipal websites for start times and any weather-related updates.

Shannon	Friday, July 3
Davis Junction	Friday, July 3
Galena	Saturday, July 4
Elizabeth	Saturday, July 4
Mount Carroll	Saturday, July 4
Savanna	Saturday, July 4
Mount Morris	Saturday, July 4
Byron	Saturday, July 4
Rochelle	Saturday, July 4



THE SCIENCE BEHIND FIREWORKS AT SRC

If you've ever wondered what makes fireworks burst into brilliant colors, the Senior Resource Center in Freeport has a program just for you.

The center's next Science Spot event, "Behind the Boom: The Science Behind Fireworks," will be held Monday, July 6th, from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Participants will learn how different chemical elements create the colorful displays seen during Independence Day celebrations, build their own mini straw rocket, and watch safe, hands-on science demonstrations.

Science Spot is designed to make science fun and accessible for adults, with no prior scientific knowledge required. The cost is \$5, but space is limited, so advance registration is required. To reserve a spot, call the Senior Resource Center at 815-235-9777.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROTEIN AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN AGING EVENT IN GALENA

Older adults looking to stay strong and independent are invited to a healthy aging program in Galena next week.

The Senior Resource Center, in partnership with University of Illinois Extension, is hosting "Protein, Physical Activity, and Aging: What You Need to Know" on Tuesday, July 7th, from 1 to 3 p.m. at Midwest Medical Center. The program will explain how getting enough protein and staying physically active can help slow age-related muscle loss, improve balance, support bone health, and maintain independence.



Health experts say adults naturally begin losing muscle mass around age 30, with the process accelerating after age 60, making proper nutrition and regular exercise more important than ever. The program costs \$5, and advance registration is encouraged. To sign up, visit go.illinois.edu/jsw or call 815-858-2273.



100 WOMEN WHO CARE LUNCH & LEARN AT SRC

Learn how a group of local women is making a big difference for Stephenson County nonprofits during an upcoming Lunch and Learn in Freeport.

The Senior Resource Center will host a presentation on 100 Women Who Care Thursday, July 9th, from noon to 1 p.m. The organization brings together women who pool their quarterly donations, allowing one local nonprofit to receive a significant charitable gift each quarter. Since its founding, the giving model has helped nonprofit organizations across the country fund projects and expand services without lengthy fundraising campaigns.

The free program will explain how the organization works, the impact it's making locally, and how women can become involved. Attendees are encouraged to bring a sack lunch. Registration is appreciated and you can call 815-235-9777.

RODEO RETURNS AT STEPHENSON COUNTY FAIR

One of the Stephenson County Fair's most popular traditions is making a comeback this summer.

After several years away, rodeo action returns to the Stephenson County Fair in Freeport with a professional rodeo scheduled for Friday night, July 25th. Fans can expect classic events including bull riding, barrel racing, saddle bronc riding, and team roping as cowboys and cowgirls from around the region compete for prize money and bragging rights.

Fair organizers say bringing the rodeo back has been one of the most requested additions from the community and reflects the fair's strong agricultural heritage. The rodeo joins a full week of entertainment, livestock shows, carnival rides, exhibits, grandstand events, and family activities when the Stephenson County Fair returns to the fairgrounds later this month. Organizers encourage visitors to purchase tickets early and check the fair schedule for event times.



IN CLOSING...

Before signing off this week, a programming note for our listeners. Did you know that you can read any of our scripts any time on our website? Along with "broadcasting" our podcast each week, we also publish a print version of each weekly news episode on our website, www.freepod.org. The print version allows you to move at your own pace to absorb the news you've been missing.

And because of the nature of a podcast, you can also get the news when you want it. While we release these newscasts every Thursday at noon, they are available anytime. So, while we appreciate it if you think of Freepod as "appointment listening," the reality is that you can download our episodes and play them whenever you have time.

And it's not just our newscasts either. Our interviews are available to listen to anytime as well, including this past week's interview. I spoke with Kris Valkema, lead singer of Blackcat Manor. Along with being a technology problem solver for FSD 145, Kris fronts the local band that has toured across the US and Canada and even had a song featured in a national television series.

This coming Tuesday, Alan Wenzel will chat with Katie Boyer about the upcoming Stephenson County Fair. That interview will be available starting at noon on Tuesday, July 7th, but you can listen anytime after that, as well. You can find it, and all of our other interviews, on our website, www.freepod.org, or wherever you get your podcasts from.

We'd like to thank our community liaisons and reporters for providing pivotal content for our program, our partners at WNIJ in DeKalb for helping to share Freepod to a larger community, and the Media Studies department at Highland Community College for producing this podcast.

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This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.



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