



# FREEPOD

The news you've been missing.

Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Amy Fisher...

And I'm Matt Mullen...

In this week's episode, Freeport School District leaders respond to the Department of Justice's investigation...

Carroll county residents have a new way to access emergency assistance...

And Cop on a Rooftop returns to raise money for a worthwhile cause.

This is Freepod for May 14th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

## FSD LEADERS RESPOND TO DOJ INVESTIGATION

Freeport School District leaders say they are cooperating fully with a federal investigation tied to Title IX compliance, but they still don't know what information the Department of Justice will request.

Superintendent Anna Alvarado told board members the district has been instructed not to destroy any records and will operate with full transparency.

The DOJ recently announced investigations into 36 Illinois school districts, including several in northern Illinois. The review focuses on issues involving sexual orientation and gender identity instruction, parental opt-out policies, and how schools handle transgender student participation in sports and bathroom access.

Alvarado says district leaders discovered many of the schools under review received federal School Violence Prevention grants, which help fund security upgrades and law enforcement training.

Despite the announcement, district officials say they have not received specific directives from the federal government.

Community members raised concerns about the cost of the investigation, while some school leaders across Illinois say the uncertainty has created confusion and tension within their communities.



## HIGHLAND COMMENCEMENT THIS WEEKEND



Graduates at Highland Community College will celebrate a major milestone during commencement ceremonies scheduled for Saturday, May 16th, in on Highland's campus in Freeport.

Family members, faculty, and community leaders are expected to gather as students receive degrees and certificates recognizing their academic achievements.

College officials say the ceremony marks the culmination of years of hard work and perseverance for graduates preparing to enter the workforce or continue their education.

Highland serves students across northwest Illinois and southern Wisconsin with a wide range of academic and career training programs.

### **TOWNSHIP GIVING BOYS & GIRLS CLUB COMPUTER UPGRADES**

Freeport Township is investing in local youth by helping fund a major technology upgrade at the Boys & Girls Club of Freeport & Stephenson County.

Township officials announced new funding will fully modernize the club's computer lab, giving students access to updated technology and digital learning opportunities.

Township Supervisor Patrick Sellers says digital literacy is essential for today's workforce and the investment will help prepare local children for future careers and education.

The Boys and Girls Club serves youth across the region through after-school programs, mentoring, and educational activities designed to support leadership and personal growth.



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUB**  
OF FREEPORT & STEPHENSON COUNTY

### **GFP LAUNCHES 'SIMPLY STEPHENSON COUNTY' BRANDING**



The Greater Freeport Partnership has launched a new tourism brand called "Simply Stephenson County," aimed at promoting Freeport and surrounding communities as a Midwest outdoor getaway destination.

Unveiled during National Travel and Tourism Week, the campaign highlights local attractions, downtowns, outdoor recreation, and small businesses through videos, storytelling, and travel itineraries.

Officials say the effort is designed to boost tourism-driven economic development and support restaurants, retailers, lodging providers, and local events across Stephenson County.

### **WINNERS CHOSEN FOR DOWNTOWN FAÇADE GRANTS**

The City of Freeport has approved seven new Downtown Façade Improvement Grants aimed at boosting investment and preserving the historic character of downtown buildings.

The grants total more than \$57,000 and will support over \$260,000 in private building improvements within the Downtown TIF District. A TIF, or Tax Increment Financing district, uses future increases in property tax revenue to help fund redevelopment and improvement projects in designated areas.

City officials say the program encourages exterior renovations that strengthen downtown businesses and support long-term economic growth.





### **LINDO THEATRE GETS MAJOR UPGRADE**

Movie fans in Freeport are now enjoying major upgrades at the historic Lindo Theatre.

Classic Cinemas has completed the first phase of renovations, adding more heated recliner seating to improve the moviegoing experience. Theater officials say the investment is designed to help attract audiences back to theaters as the industry continues recovering from the pandemic.

While the upgrades reduce overall seating capacity, company leaders believe the added comfort and affordable ticket prices will help boost attendance and keep the Lindo competitive for years to come.

### **CITY PREPARES FOR DEMETER DRIVE WATER MAIN PROJECT**

The City of Freeport says work on the Demeter Drive Water Main and Street Reconstruction Project will begin in the coming weeks, bringing major infrastructure upgrades to the area.

As part of the project, several large trees located within the city right-of-way will be removed to make way for construction and protect long-term safety. Officials say trees marked with paint dots or painted X's are scheduled for removal soon.

City leaders say underground utility work often damages root systems, which can create future hazards if trees are left in place.

The city says replacement tree planting may be considered after construction is complete.



### **CITY OF FREEPORT RECEIVES RECOGNITION FOR WATER QUALITY**

The City of Freeport has earned Gold Level recognition as a Water Ambassador Community from the Illinois Section American Water Works Association.

The designation recognizes communities that excel in water quality, environmental stewardship, public outreach, and investment in water infrastructure.

City leaders say the award highlights Freeport's ongoing commitment to delivering safe, dependable drinking water while promoting conservation and public awareness throughout the community.

## COMPOSTING SUPPLIES AVAILABLE AT FARMER'S MARKET

A new composting program is launching in Freeport to help residents reduce food waste and support local agriculture.

The Compost Bucket Exchange Program, created in partnership with The Loving Seed Farm and supported by the City of Freeport, allows residents to purchase a two-gallon compost bucket for a one-time fee of \$10.

Participants can fill the bucket with approved food scraps and exchange it for a clean bucket during weekly farmers market visits.

Organizers say the pilot program aims to promote sustainability, healthier soil, and community involvement.

## Compost Bucket Exchange Program Here!



## ESSAY CONTEST OPEN TO AREA STUDENTS



State Representative Tony McCombie is inviting middle and high school students across northwest Illinois to take part in a new “America 250 Essay Contest” ahead of the nation’s upcoming 250th anniversary celebration.

The contest is open to students in grades 6 through 12 living in Illinois’ 89th House District, which includes parts of Stephenson County, Jo Daviess County, and several surrounding counties.

Students are asked to reflect on America’s history and future in essays between 200 and 500 words.

Entries are due by May 31st, with the winning essay to be announced in June. For more information, or to submit an essay, visit <https://repmccombie.com/2026/04/29/essay-contest-invites-students-to-reflect-on-america-at-250/>.

## TEXT-TO-911 NOW AVAILABLE THROUGHOUT CARROLL COUNTY

Residents in Carroll County can now text 9-1-1 during emergencies.

The Carroll County Sheriff’s Office officially launched its new Text-to-911 service, allowing people to send emergency text messages when they are unable to safely place a phone call.

Officials say the service is especially important for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, speech impaired, or in situations where speaking could put them in danger.

Emergency dispatchers say callers should still call 9-1-1 whenever possible, but remind residents: “Call if you can, text if you can’t.”





### **CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON OGLE COUNTY MEMORIAL PLAZA**

Construction is moving forward on a new memorial plaza outside the Ogle County Courthouse in Oregon.

County officials say the project is designed to create a gathering space honoring veterans, public servants, and community history while enhancing the courthouse grounds.

Plans for the plaza include landscaping, seating areas, walkways, and memorial features recognizing those who have served the county and nation.

Leaders say the project will provide a lasting tribute and a welcoming public space for residents and visitors in Ogle County.

### **ILLINOIS FARM BUREAUS & FFA CHAPTERS RAISE MONEY FOR HUNGER RELIEF**

Illinois Farm Bureau Young Leaders, collegiate Farm Bureau chapters, and FFA students raised more than \$233,000 and donated 154,000 pounds of food this year to help fight hunger across Illinois.

The effort was part of the national Harvest for All program led by the American Farm Bureau Federation. Volunteers also logged nearly 15,000 hours of community service.



Illinois groups earned national recognition for innovation and outreach, including food drives, hurricane relief hay donations, and classroom supply projects for first-year agriculture teachers.



### **DURBIN WILL NOT BACK FARM BILL**

Dick Durbin says he cannot support the current House version of the Farm Bill, criticizing proposed cuts to SNAP food assistance and calling the measure politically unrealistic in the Senate.

Speaking in Normal, Illinois, Durbin said lawmakers have broken the long-standing coalition between rural and urban interests needed to pass a Farm Bill.

He also pushed for year-round sales of E-15 ethanol fuel and said tariffs imposed during the Trump administration damaged U.S. agriculture by helping competitors like Brazil gain ground in global markets.

Durbin, who has served in the Senate for 30 years, is retiring at the end of this term.

## ILLINOIS HAS 6TH HIGHEST GAS PRICES IN COUNTRY

Gas prices continue climbing across the Midwest as tensions tied to the Iran war push fuel costs to their highest levels in four years.

According to AAA, Illinois drivers are now paying an average of \$4.94 per gallon for regular gasoline — the highest in the Midwest and 6th highest in the country. Prices in neighboring states are also rising, including Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana.

Wisconsin remains lower at \$4.40 a gallon, while Missouri and Iowa have some of the cheapest gas in the region.

Nationwide, the average price now stands at \$4.48 per gallon — more than a dollar higher than this time last year.



## MAY IS BIKE MONTH

May is Bike Month, and local leaders say Stephenson County is the perfect place to celebrate on two wheels.

From scenic road rides to off-road trails, officials say biking helps support both healthy lifestyles and the local economy.

Communities like Freeport continue investing in outdoor recreation as more visitors and potential residents look for authentic experiences, trail access, and quality-of-life amenities.

Organizers encourage residents to get outside this month, explore local trails, and support area businesses along the way.

## COP ON A ROOFTOP RETURNS

Law enforcement officers in Freeport will take fundraising to new heights during the annual “Cop on a Rooftop” event this Friday, May 15th.

Local officers will join departments across Illinois by spending the morning atop a Dunkin’ Donuts location collecting donations for Special Olympics Illinois.

Supporters who donate can receive free donut and coffee coupons, with special event merchandise also available.

Organizers say the statewide fundraiser has raised millions of dollars over the past two decades to support athletes with intellectual disabilities through year-round sports training and competition programs.

# DUNKIN’ COP ON A ROOFTOP

**BENEFITTING SPECIAL OLYMPICS ILLINOIS**

## IN CLOSING...

As we wrap up this week's show, we'd like to remind you all to listen to this past week's interview. Becky Connors spoke to Bruce Cubberley, the executive director of the Freeport Park District. Becky and Bruce discuss summer programming options for young folks to keep busy while school is out of session, as well as some big improvements the Park District is making to Freeport's parks.

This coming Tuesday, Freepod host Alan Wenzel speaks with Bing Wells. Bing is responsible for bringing a fighter jet to Lena and the celebration surrounding it. That interview will be available starting at noon on Tuesday, May 19th. You can find it, and all of our other interviews, on our website, [www.freepod.org](http://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 Mass Communication 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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