



Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Matt Mullen...

And I'm Amy Fisher...

In this week's episode, West Nile Virus is confirmed in Carroll County...

Ben Zobrist Day is upon us...

And we take a special look at the impact on northwest Illinois of the one and only Dolly Parton.

This is Freepod for September 3rd, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

WEST NILE VIRUS CONFIRMED IN CARROLL COUNTY

West Nile virus has been confirmed in Carroll County, and health officials are reminding residents that mosquito season isn't over just because summer is winding down.

The Illinois Department of Public Health lists Carroll County among 50 Illinois counties where West Nile virus activity has been detected so far this year. State surveillance includes positive mosquitoes, birds, horses and human cases.



Illinois confirmed its first human West Nile case of 2026 this week in Piatt County, while three additional probable human cases have been identified in northern Illinois.

West Nile is spread to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. Most infected people never develop symptoms, but about one in five may experience fever, headache, body aches or joint pain. In rare cases, the virus can cause serious neurological illness. People over 60 and those with weakened immune systems face the greatest risk.

Health officials recommend eliminating standing water around homes, repairing damaged window screens and using an EPA-registered insect repellent when outdoors.

Last year, Illinois recorded 150 human West Nile cases and ten deaths.

Officials say mosquito-bite precautions should continue until cold weather brings mosquito activity to an end.

JO DAVIESS ZONING AMENDMENTS SENT BACK TO COUNTY BOARD



A debate over how much farmland should be required for a residential lot is continuing in Jo Daviess County.

The issue is part of a larger review of the county's zoning ordinance, but one of the most controversial proposals involves the minimum lot size in areas zoned agricultural.

The county currently requires 40 acres for a lot in the Agricultural District. Earlier this summer, the Planning Commission recommended reducing that minimum to two acres.

But the County Board rejected the two-acre proposal July 14 by a 13-to-3 vote and sent the issue back to the Planning Commission, asking it to consider a 10-acre minimum instead.

Supporters of allowing smaller parcels argue it could give landowners greater flexibility and create additional opportunities for rural housing.

But the county's existing zoning policy emphasizes protecting productive farmland from residential development and incompatible uses. Officials must balance those concerns against demand for rural homes and property-owner flexibility.

The Planning Commission held another public hearing Wednesday, August 26. It also considered limits on non-agricultural accessory areas on parcels smaller than five acres and when a special-use permit should be required.

Any recommendations coming out of that hearing could go before the Jo Daviess County Board as early as September 8.

A NEW DOWNTOWN POCKET PARK IS GAINING TRACTION

A vacant space in downtown Freeport is being transformed into a new public gathering place.

The city is developing the Karcher Block Pocket Park along West Stephenson Street, on property where downtown buildings once stood. The project began with a T-Mobile Hometown Grant and was later expanded through support from longtime Freeport community advocate Marianne Garvens.



Plans call for green space, a patio and other amenities designed to provide a place for residents and downtown visitors to gather.

The park takes its name from the historic Karcher Block, and plans also recognize Luella Karcher, a prominent figure in Freeport's garden-club history.

The City of Freeport held an open house this week seeking public input on the park.

City officials say the project is intended to add another community space downtown while supporting continued redevelopment and activity in the surrounding business district.



PARK TO CLARK ROADWORK UNDERWAY

Drivers traveling through Freeport are being warned to expect delays as a major road construction project gets underway on Business U.S. 20.

The Illinois Department of Transportation began work this week on Galena Avenue between Park Boulevard and Clark Street.

The 7-point-4-million-dollar project will be completed in two stages. This year's work includes pavement patching, curb and gutter repairs, and improvements to sidewalk ramps to meet accessibility standards.

Then, beginning next spring, crews will mill and resurface the roadway and make improvements to traffic signals.

One lane will remain open in each direction throughout construction, but IDOT says drivers should expect slow or stopped traffic and consider alternate routes when possible.

The roughly one-point-three-mile project is scheduled to be completed by July of 2027.

JO DAVIESS APPROVES CONSOLIDATING PUBLIC HOUSING WITH WINNEBAGO COUNTY

Jo Daviess County is moving forward with a major change in how public housing assistance is administered — but residents who rely on those programs are not losing their housing assistance.



The County Board approved an agreement August 11 to transfer the Jo Daviess County Housing Authority's public housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs to the Winnebago County Housing Authority. The move comes as the result of a new directive from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD. The transfer includes 104 public housing units and related assets and still requires federal approval from HUD.

For residents, the biggest change would be administrative. The housing programs would continue, but would be managed by the larger Winnebago County authority, which already administers housing programs outside Winnebago County. Jo Daviess County would also retain a voice in the system through a local resident appointed to the Winnebago authority's board.

The Jo Daviess County Housing Authority currently provides public housing in Galena, Elizabeth, Hanover and Warren.



FREEPORT PARK DISTRICT ANNOUNCES UPCOMING TRIPS

If you're looking for a day away without having to do the driving, the Freeport Park District has announced a new lineup of bus and van trips for the coming months.

The first is a September 10 trip to the Hard Rock Casino, running from 11 a.m. until 9 p.m. Additional Hard Rock trips are scheduled through next March.

On September 19, the Park District heads to Brookfield Zoo, with zoo admission included in the registration fee.

October brings an Oktoberfest outing to Lake Geneva, including a two-hour cruise aboard the Grand Belle, live music and a German lunch buffet.

Holiday trips include a November visit to Aurora's Paramount Theatre for A Christmas Carol, followed by the annual Magnificent Mile shopping trip to Chicago on December 5.

Trips depart from Freeport, and space is limited — with van trips capped at just 14 passengers.

Registration is available through freeportparkdistrict.org or by calling 815-235-6114.

APPLE ORCHARD SEASON IS HERE EARLY

Fall may still be a few weeks away, but apple season is already getting underway in Northwest Illinois.

Several area orchards have opened for the season as early varieties including Zestar and other late-summer apples become ready for harvest.



In Jo Daviess County, Orchard Landing, Co. near Hanover opened August 22 and is welcoming customers on weekends.

Dittmar Farms And Orchard near Elizabeth is also open, with its apple season typically beginning in late August. In Ogle County, BerryView Orchard near Mount Morris is beginning its fall season, while in Stephenson County, DeMeester's Greenhouse & Appleland Orchard Inc. near Freeport is open under new ownership and preparing its apples, cider donuts and other fall offerings.

The early openings are a reminder that apple season doesn't wait for the calendar to say fall. Early varieties typically ripen in August, while favorites including Honeycrisp, Gala and McIntosh become available as the season moves into September.

BEN ZOBRIST DAY IS HERE



A hero from one of the biggest moments in Chicago Cubs history is coming to Freeport.

2016 World Series MVP Ben Zobrist will headline Ben Zobrist Day Saturday, September 5, at Little Cubs Field.

The free event runs from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. and will benefit Zobrist's nonprofit, Champion Forward, which works with young athletes, parents and coaches to promote mental and emotional wellness in sports.

Zobrist will lead a mini baseball camp for kids, take part in a question-and-answer session and compete in a home-run challenge with winners from youth home-run derbies. Several autograph and photo sessions are also planned, although organizers say those sessions have already filled.

Zobrist will also discuss his new book, *Prepare for the Pressure*.

And Cubs fans will get a look at a special piece of World Series history — the 2017 Chevrolet Camaro Zobrist received after being named MVP of the Cubs' 2016 championship. Zobrist hit the go-ahead double in the tenth inning of Game Seven, helping the Cubs capture their first World Series title in 108 years.

Ben Zobrist Day is September 5 at Little Cubs Field on West Empire Street in Freeport. Admission is free.

PRITZKER SIGNS NEW LAW GOVERNING E-BIKES

Illinois is putting new statewide rules in place for electric bikes and scooters as the devices become faster and more common.

Governor JB Pritzker has signed Senate Bill 3484, establishing age requirements, speed limits and rules governing where e-bikes, e-scooters and other electric mobility devices can be operated.



Under the new law, riders must be at least 15 to operate lower-speed Class One and Class Two e-bikes, and 16 to operate Class Three bikes capable of reaching 28 miles per hour. Low-speed e-bikes will be prohibited from sidewalks.

High-speed e-bikes capable of exceeding 28 miles per hour will be treated more like motorcycles, requiring a driver's license, insurance, title and registration.

Electric scooter riders must generally be at least 16, with high-speed scooters limited to 28 miles per hour. Supporters say the statewide standards are needed following a series of serious and fatal crashes involving young riders.

The new rules take effect January first.



ILLINOIS GETS MORE THAN \$1B FOR BROADBAND EXPANSION

More than one-billion dollars in federal funding is headed to Illinois to expand high-speed internet access — with rural communities expected to be among the biggest beneficiaries.

Illinois has received final approval for one-point-zero-four-billion dollars through the federal Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment, or BEAD, program.

State officials say the investment will help connect about 350-thousand Illinois residents through homes, businesses and community institutions by 2031.

That could be particularly important in rural Northwest Illinois, where homes and farms can be expensive for internet providers to connect because of the distance between customers.

State officials say expanded broadband can improve access to telehealth and online education while helping farmers use precision-agriculture technology and giving rural businesses better access to customers and employees.

Combined with previous public funding and private investment, Illinois says its total broadband investment will

now exceed two-billion dollars.

More than 20-thousand Illinois households have already been connected through earlier rounds of the state's Connect Illinois program.

CAST IRON CHEF IN ELIZABETH

History will be cooking over an open fire next weekend at the Apple River Fort in Elizabeth.

The State Historic Site will host its annual Cast Iron Chef event Saturday, September 5, from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m.



Staff and volunteers will demonstrate how people prepared meals on the Illinois frontier nearly two centuries ago, using cast-iron cookware, open fires and actual recipes from the 1830s. Visitors can watch dishes being baked, boiled and braised while learning about historic cooking tools and techniques.

Health regulations mean visitors won't be able to sample the food, but copies of the historic recipes will be available to take home.

The reconstructed Apple River Fort commemorates the original fort built during the Black Hawk War of 1832.

Cast Iron Chef is family-friendly and free to attend. The Apple River Fort is located at 311 East Myrtle Street in Elizabeth.



JANE ADDAMS BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

One of Northwest Illinois' most influential historical figures will be remembered on what would have been her 166th birthday.

The Cedarville Area Historical Society will host a Jane Addams Birthday Lunch Sunday, September 6, beginning at 11 a.m. at the Cedarville Museum.

Addams was born in Cedarville on September 6, 1860, and later graduated from Rockford Female Seminary. She went on to co-found Chicago's Hull House in 1889, becoming a nationally recognized advocate for immigrants, working families, women's rights and social reform.

Her work eventually extended to the international peace movement, and in 1931, Addams became the first American woman awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Cedarville Historical Museum maintains an exhibit devoted to Addams, including materials documenting her family, childhood and work.

The Jane Addams Birthday Lunch begins at 11 Sunday at the museum on Second Street in Cedarville.

SRC HOLDING MEDICARE BASICS CLASS

Northwest Illinois seniors who have questions about Medicare can get some free help next month in Stockton.

The Senior Resource Center will hold a Medicare Basics Class Tuesday, September 15, from 11 a.m. until noon at the Stockton Township Public Library.

The program is open to people 60 and older and their caregivers and will cover Medicare coverage choices, enrollment periods and other information people need when making health-care decisions.

The Senior Resource Center also administers Illinois' Senior Health Insurance Program locally. SHIP counselors provide free and confidential assistance with Medicare, Medicare Advantage and supplemental insurance, prescription drug coverage and other benefits — without selling or promoting insurance plans.

The September 15 class is free. Advance registration is encouraged, although walk-ins are welcome.

To register, call the Senior Resource Center at 815-235-9777.



LABOR DAY TRAIN RIDES



A Labor Day tradition is returning to Freeport, giving families a chance to ride the rails while getting a look at Northwest Illinois history.

The Stephenson County Antique Engine Club will hold its Labor Day Extravaganza Monday, September 7, from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. at the Silver Creek Museum complex on South Walnut Road.

The day includes rides on the Silver Creek and Stephenson Railroad, along with museum tours, food, popcorn and demonstrations of historic equipment.

The railroad's signature locomotive is a 1912 Heisler steam engine pulling passenger cars and an antique caboose on a roughly four-mile round trip through the countryside, including a crossing over Yellow Creek. Visitors can also explore the Silver Creek Museum's collection of early Americana and see the massive 130-ton Cooper-Corliss steam engine.

The Labor Day event runs from 11 until 4 at 2954 South Walnut Road in Freeport.

HISTORY OF LABOR DAY

Labor Day weekend may mark the unofficial end of summer, but the holiday began as a recognition of America's working people and the labor movement that fought for better working conditions.

The first Labor Day celebration was held in New York City in 1882, and Congress made the first Monday in September a federal holiday in 1894 — the same year as Illinois' historic Pullman Strike.

Illinois played an especially important role in organized labor. In 1886, tens of



thousands of Chicago workers joined the nationwide campaign for an eight-hour workday. That struggle culminated in the Haymarket Affair, an event that became an international symbol of the labor movement.

Organized labor also has deep roots in Northwest Illinois. Records show a Freeport Trades and Labor Council was operating by the early 1900s, and generations of manufacturing workers later organized at some of the area's largest employers.

Perhaps the best-known example is Freeport's tire plant. Workers at Kelly-Springfield were represented by United Rubber Workers Local 745, which became part of the United Steelworkers after the Rubber Workers merged with the Steelworkers in 1995. Today, USW Local 745 continues representing workers at the Freeport tire plant, now operated by Titan Tire, along with other local workers.

So while Labor Day brings cookouts and a three-day weekend, its roots are in more than a century of workers organizing for wages, hours, benefits and a voice on the job.



DOLLY PARTON'S IMPACT ON NORTHWEST ILLINOIS

As the world continues to mourn country music legend Dolly Parton, we here at Freepod would like to honor her incredible contribution to our community. Even though Dolly lived hundreds of miles from Northwest Illinois, her impact can be found on bookshelves in thousands of local homes.

Since 2015, United Way of Northwest Illinois has served as the local partner for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Stephenson, Jo Daviess and Carroll counties. The program mails a free, age-appropriate book every month to registered children from birth through age five — regardless of family income. A child enrolled from birth can receive as many as 60 books before entering kindergarten.

United Way says more than 261-thousand Imagination Library books have been mailed to Northwest Illinois children since 2016. More than 5,200 children have graduated from the program across the three counties.

And the impact goes beyond building home libraries. United Way reports 90-percent of participating families say they spend more time reading with their children, while 60-percent report their children have become more interested in reading.

Parton created the Imagination Library in Tennessee in 1995, inspired in part by her father's inability to read and write. Today, the program mails more than three-million books every month around the world.

IN CLOSING

Before we go, a quick programming note. If you'd rather read the news than listen to it, we've got you covered. Every week, we post a complete written version of this newscast on our website at freepod.org. It's a great way to catch up on local news at your own pace or revisit a story you want to read in more detail.

And remember, podcasts are available whenever it's convenient for you. While new episodes are released every Thursday at noon, you can listen anytime—whether you're driving to work, mowing the lawn, or relaxing at home. Subscribe wherever you get your podcasts, or visit freepod.org to listen and read whenever it works best for you.

And it's not just our newscasts either. Our interviews are available to listen to anytime as well, including this

past week's interview. Freepod host Tim Connors spoke with principal Sarah Hasken and Social Studies chair Whitney Eberle about Freeport High School's upcoming historic centennial celebration.

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.

As always, please like us on Facebook, subscribe on the podcast platform of your choice, and share with your friends. If you'd like to make a tax-deductible contribution to support local news content, please visit our website at www.freepod.org.

This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.



FREEPOD

The news you've been missing.