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Hello, everyone! I'm Pat Norman and I welcome you to the second episode of FREEPOD, a source for local news for everyone in the Freeport area. This weekly podcast is brought to you by a group of volunteers, dedicated to providing objective, unbiased, and non-partisan news, specific to our community. We are dedicated to accuracy and also will correct any errors quickly and openly.

We also apologize for any mispronunciations of names, used in our podcasts.

Our stories today include City of Freeport Mayor Jody Miller named to the Board of the National League of Cities, United Way announcing that 211 has Come to Freeport, Juliet Moderow receives an award from the National Audubon Society, news about Freeport Park District's Controlled Forest Burns, and we highlight the Aquin Lady Bulldog's basketball team.

((PAULETTE))

Hello everyone. I'm Paulette Williams-Thomas and today is Thursday, January 11, 2024. Welcome to FREEPOD and let's get started on the news you've been missing.

First up.....

Jodi Miller Joins Board of National League of Cities

Freeport Mayor Jodi Miller was recently named a board member of the National League of Cities. She joins 25 other new board members each serving a two-year term. Miller was interviewed for the honor in November and will attend her first meeting by Zoom on January 17. In March, she will go to Washington, D.C. for a quarterly in-person meeting.

In her new role, Miller will have the opportunity to network with other mayors, influence legislation, and advocate for and protect the interests of communities like Freeport. She says that this is a great opportunity to learn about best practices, benchmark other cities, and open doors for Freeport. Miller is excited to participate and eager to bring innovative solutions back home for consideration.

The National League of Cities, which began 100 years ago in 1924, is an organization of nearly 3,000 local leaders focused on improving the quality of life for their current and future constituents. Members represent the country's almost 20,000 cities, towns, and villages along with 49 state municipal leagues. Miller has been a member of the organization for several years and has also been active in the State Municipal League.

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211 Comes to Freeport

If you or someone you know needs assistance with identifying community resources, the United Way of Northwest Illinois can now easily connect you with experts to help in finding anything from housing and food, to legal representation. Just dial 211.

211 is an easy-to-remember phone number. It is a one-stop connection to local services including employment, utility assistance, child care, after-school programs, elder care, crisis intervention, healthcare and much more. Referral experts are available to help 24/7 and can assist in over 150 languages. All calls are free, anonymous, and confidential. You can also call 211 to find opportunities to volunteer or provide other support.

211 was assigned by the Federal Communications Commission to streamline access to health and human services across the country, and the United Way of Northwest Illinois is pleased to make it available for our region. So, remember – 211 is your resource for help!

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Moderow Receives Award from the National Audubon Society

Highland Community College biology instructor Juliet Moderow recently received the National Audubon Society's William Dutcher Award recognizing outstanding volunteers. Moderow is active with the local Northwest Illinois Audubon Society and has been a board member in different capacities over the past 10 years, including a two-year term as President.

At the National Audubon conference in Colorado, Moderow said she was proud to represent the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society. Says Moderow, "I am humbled by the honor because the work I have done in the community is something I truly enjoy — teaching people of all ages, color, abilities, and identities about the beauty of birds. I am very appreciative of this recognition and hope it can inspire others to do similar work."

Related to diversity and inclusion, Moderow has worked to increase a sense of belonging and accessibility to birding for anyone and everyone. The birding community has historically lacked diversity and in connection with her work as Co-chair of the Highland Diversity Committee, Moderow implemented equality and diversity initiatives during her time on the local Audubon board.

Initiatives she developed include making binoculars available for check out at the Freeport Public Library, youth events, programs at nursing homes and independent living housing, starting a bird club at the Freeport Boys and Girls Club, developing accessible bird outings for individuals with physical disabilities, and helping Freeport become one of the first of three Bird Cities of Illinois, a state program she also helped develop.

Want to learn more about birding? Sign up for Lifelong Learning courses on Basic Birding taught voluntarily by Moderow at Highland Community College.

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Controlled Forest Burns

Several local residents were alarmed a few weeks ago when smoke billowed up from the Oakdale Nature Preserve. The smoke was in the air for quite some time, but there was no need for concern. These fires had been set intentionally as part of the Freeport Park District's forest management master plan.

Bruce Cubberley, Superintendent of Parks & Natural Resources for the Freeport Park District, confirmed the importance of controlled burns in ensuring that the popular 134-acre park is a healthy forest environment.

Cubberley said that a controlled burn, replicates what happens in nature, when lightning causes fires that get rid of what is essentially fuel, on the forest floor. This fuel consists of live underbrush, invasive plants such as buckthorn, branches, and leaf litter. While leaf litter can decay pretty quickly, branches and undergrowth can take too long and damage the ecosystem by smothering other plant growth. Burning also eliminates nuisance plants more quickly like garlic mustard and speeds up the nutrient cycle, encouraging wild flowers and other desirable forest plants to grow stronger.

For those worried that the fire seemed to be smoldering for a long time, Cubberley explained that the amount and type of debris determines the duration of the burn. When there are a lot of branches, actual wood, and live underbrush, and not just leaves, the smoldering lasts longer. Those working the burn, carefully observe the entire area until they are sure there will be no flame-ups and are always equipped with water and other fire protections.

To learn more about controlled burns, the Northwest Illinois Forestry Association is hosting a seminar on the subject on January 27 at the Galena Center for the Arts. The speaker is Gillian Moore, conservation ecologist and United States Forest Service wildland firefighter. A Drone video of a local woodland prescribed burn will be shown and discussed at the seminar. Pre-register for the "Carrying the Torch" seminar at the University of Illinois Extension website at www.extension.illinois.edu. Moore is also an artist and a related art exhibit will be open to the public on Sunday, January 28 from 1 to 4 pm at the Galena Center for the Arts.

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Another Highlight

As we've said, we are not going to be the right place, to find out about every community sports activity, but we're always glad to pass along notable local achievements.

So, in a highlight this week, we recognize the Aquin Lady Bulldogs basketball team who are coming together and gaining momentum. They beat Pecatonica 58-40 on January 3, and Pec is ranked 6th in the state for class 1A girls' basketball. Go, Lady Bulldogs. Listen to future FREEPOD broadcasts for more highlights!

Well, we've run out of time! Tune in again next week when we'll have more info about Freeport businesses, City plans and progress, area rewards and recognition, info on the area's economic condition, and more.

FREEPOD couldn't come to you without the help of many local supporters, and today we'd like to recognize M45 Marketing for webmaster services, promotional support and meeting space. Thank you for helping us get started!

If you would like to be involved, get in touch with us through our website at www.freepod.org. If you can help us get going with a donation, we'd sure appreciate it. As a volunteer organization our expenses are minimal but we still do need to pay for things such as website production, web hosting, and modest promotional marketing. We welcome gifts of any size and greatly appreciate your support!

Again, I'm Paulette Williams Thomas here with Pat Norman and we hope that you'll let your friends and neighbors know about us for news you can trust and stories you'll enjoy. You'll can find previous podcasts at www.freepod.org where you can also send us feedback and ideas for future stories, and sign up to be notified when a new pod is posted.

We're excited to bring important, current, valued news to all listeners of FREEPOD, so please check back next week for more news you've been missing! Thank you for listening!