



Episode #3
18 Jan 2024

Hello, everyone! Welcome to the third episode of FREEPOD, a source for truly local news for everyone in the Freeport area. This weekly podcast is brought to you by a large volunteer group dedicated to providing to objective, unbiased, and non-partisan news specific to our community.

As you listen today, you're in good company. Almost 1,000 people listened to our first podcast three weeks ago and we've had over 5,000 visits to our website. We think that's a pretty good start and we're looking forward to more listeners every week. Thank you for your enthusiasm. Let's get started on the news you've been missing.

2023 Economy Summary Data

Today we have Part One of an important three-part story on how the economy has been changing in Stephenson County. We'll have the other two parts in the next two episodes. Today, we look at population trends.

The County continues to lose residents, with the 2020 census showing a loss of 3,081 people, or 6.4%. In 2010 the total population was 47,711 compared to 44,630 in 2020. The 2020 census for the City of Freeport showed 23,973 people compared to 25,638 in 2010, also representing a loss of 6.5% or 1,665 people.

When the City population dropped below 25,000 it lost automatic Home Rule governing status that allowed Freeport to exercise any power and perform any function unless specifically prohibited by state law. Communities with fewer than 25,000 residents can vote to keep Home Rule status and voters returned Freeport to Home Rule by passing a ballot initiative in 2023.

The County also continues to see a larger percentage of population over 45 years old. The median age here is 45.3 years compared to a national median age of 38.5 years.

In education, for the years 2018 through 2022, the County shows 91.8% of the population age 25 or older with a high-school diploma, two percent higher than the national average of 89.8. However, the national average for those age 25 or older with a four-year degree is 37.7% while the Stephenson County percentage is only 20.3%.

Fortunately, Stephenson County has Highland Community College and Columbia College which offer both two-year associate degrees and four-year bachelor's degrees locally.

We thank State Bank of Freeport for much of this data and next week we'll take a look at more important economic statistics for the County and City.

New Welding Lab at HCC

Speaking of Highland Community College, a new welding lab was opened there in December. Welding training courses have been offered at Highland Community College for decades but this bigger, up-to-date facility will help increase the capability to meet regional workforce demands.

At more than double the size of the original space, all-new equipment includes welding machines, an exhaust system, safety curtains, and gas lines directly plumbed into each workstation for enhanced student safety.

The college continues to work with its Advisory Committee, local manufacturers, and the Plumbers and Pipefitters union to evaluate Welding program offerings and ensure that local instruction is always current on the latest welding procedures.

Center School/US News and World Report

Elsewhere in local education news, teachers, administrators, students, and parents from Center Elementary School in Freeport have something to celebrate.

Their school has earned a Best Elementary School distinction from US News and World Report, placing the school in the top 40% of all schools in the state of Illinois. Center School is part of Freeport School District 145.

The school's Facebook page says that student growth has been tremendous. Though they still have room to grow, these awesome kids, families, and staff members are putting Center School on the map!

Amity's Attic Moves to Lincoln Mall

In local business news, Amity's Attic has moved to the Freeport Lincoln Mall. A grand opening is scheduled for this Saturday, January 20. Clothing and household items are among the many items available at the Attic. Countless volunteers have dedicated time, funding, and materials to make the move a reality.

The move to the Mall is a significant milestone in the organization's history. Founded in 1880, the Amity Society of Freeport is one of the oldest children's charities in the United States. The Amity Day Care and Learning Center was opened in the 1960s and since then, Amity's Attic has raised over a million dollars in support of its efforts.

Amity's Attic will have new hours from 10 am to 4 pm Tuesday through Saturday.

Sports Snapshot

In this Sports Snapshot, we have more one-thousand-point achievers! Congratulations to Orangeville High School senior Whitney Sullivan and junior Laney Cahoon who both hit the 1000-point mark at recent basketball games. Chris Cahoon, Whitney's stepdad, is an assistant coach for the Orangeville Broncos, and Laney's mom, Julie Cahoon Jackson, is the JV coach. Congratulations to these cousins on all those buckets!

Events for Your Consideration

Looking to the week ahead in events, please note that the Day of Racial Healing scheduled for last Saturday was rescheduled due to extreme winter weather. It will now take place on Saturday, February 24. Refresh your memory on the agenda at the FREEPOD website.

Also, this coming week on Tuesday, January 23 the League of Women Voters of Freeport is hosting a candidate meet and greet on at 6 p.m. at the Freeport Public Library. This year's program is being co-sponsored by the Freeport Branch of the NAACP.

Local candidates in the March 19 Illinois Primary Election will introduce themselves and be able to talk one-on-one with attendees. Matt Dietrich of the Illinois State Board of Elections will also provide a quick overview of current Illinois voting regulations via Zoom. All members of the public are invited.

Reminders

Lastly, here are two reminders for the coming week.

First-class mail rates are going up two cents this coming Sunday, January 21 with the price of a Forever stamp increasing from 66 cents to 68 cents. Stamps bought before Sunday at 66 cents are indeed valid forever so you may want to head to the Post Office or another local source for an extra supply. The United States postal service says their prices remain among the most affordable in the world.

And finally, please help City snow plowers do their jobs. When a snow emergency is declared, park on the even-numbered side of the street on even-numbered days of the month and the odd-numbered side of the street on odd-numbered days. When this ordinance is not followed, plows have to go around vehicles on both sides of the street, resulting in awkward driving lanes that can also be hazardous. Don't be the reason you or anyone else gets stuck in a snowdrift!

Until Next Week

Time's up for this week but tune in again next week when we'll have more info about Freeport businesses, City plans and progress, area rewards and recognition, Part Two of our multi-part story on the area's economic conditions, and more.

As we've said before, FREEPOD couldn't come to you without the help of many local supporters, and today we'd like to recognize the law offices of Robert E. Eden for legal assistance. Thank you, Mr. Eden!

If you would like to be involved, get in touch with us through our website at www.freepod.org. and remember that as an all-volunteer organization we sure appreciate donations to help with our minimal expenses like website production, web hosting, and modest promotional marketing.

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