



FREEPOD

The news you've been missing.

Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Paulette Williams-Thomas...

And I'm Pat Norman...

In this week's episode, Aquin Academy announces their permanent closure...

A Galena museum gets a major gift from a local nonprofit...

And Music Under the Stars readies to launch their next season.

This is Freepod for May 28th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

AQUIN ACADEMY ANNOUNCES CLOSURE

After more than a century of Catholic education in Freeport, Aquin Catholic Academy will permanently close at the end of the school year. The Diocese of Rockford announced Bishop David Malloy accepted a recommendation to shut down the academy, with staff informed of the decision last Friday. The school's final day will be May 29th.

The decision follows months of study by a task force led by Father Peter Snieg, pastor of Saint Thomas Aquinas Parish. The group gathered feedback from families, faculty, alumni, parish leaders, and community members before recommending closure.

The Diocese says enrollment has continued to decline, with just 39 students enrolled in kindergarten through eighth grade this school year, and only about half identified as Catholic. Aquin High School had already closed in 2024 because of low enrollment and financial concerns after serving the community for more than 100 years.

Diocesan officials say families wishing to continue Catholic education are encouraged to meet with their pastors to discuss tuition assistance and transportation options.



AQUIN
SCHOOLS

FREEPORT MAN CHARGED WITH INTENT TO DELIVER FENTANYL



A Freeport man is facing multiple drug charges following a traffic stop in Orangeville. The Stephenson County Sheriff's Office says 43-year-old Michael Griffin was arrested after deputies stopped a vehicle at a gas station near Route 26 and West High Street.

Authorities say Griffin was a passenger in the vehicle when a sheriff's K-9 conducted a free-air sniff and alerted deputies to the possible presence of narcotics.

Investigators say deputies found approximately seven-and-a-half grams of suspected fentanyl hidden in Griffin's waistband. He is charged with possession with intent to

deliver fentanyl, possession of a controlled substance, and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Griffin was booked into the Stephenson County Jail and later released under provisions of Illinois' SAFE-T Act.

HCC NURSING PROGRAM GETS REACCREDITATION

Highland Community College's Associate Degree Nursing program has earned continuing accreditation from the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing, or ACEN. The program is based at Highland's campus on West Pearl City Road in Freeport.

College officials say the reaccreditation confirms the program continues meeting national standards for nursing education and workforce preparation. Dean of Nursing and Allied Health Stephanie Eymann says the recognition reflects the dedication of faculty, staff, and clinical partners committed to preparing skilled and compassionate nurses.



ACEN accreditation is designed to ensure nursing programs maintain strong educational objectives and produce graduates ready to enter the healthcare workforce. Highland officials say the program will continue focusing on innovation, collaboration, and community partnerships in nursing education.



SHAWNEE-HANCOCK VIADUCT IS OPEN

The Shawnee and Hancock Viaduct in Freeport has officially reopened to traffic after six months of construction and upgrades. City officials say the project included replacement of the water main and storm sewer system, along with lowering the roadway by three feet to improve access for semi-trucks and emergency vehicles entering the Arcade area.

The viaduct project was designed to support traffic flow during the ongoing rehabilitation of the nearby Hancock Avenue Bridge, a key east-side connection over the Pecatonica River. Engineers say lowering the roadway creates a permanent truck route through the area while improving long-term public safety and infrastructure reliability.

City officials thanked Helm Group and city crews for their work completing the project.

RAMP OFFERING FREE COMMUNICATION DEVICES FOR AREA RESIDENTS

Residents in northwest Illinois living with permanent speech disabilities may qualify for free communication devices through a program offered by RAMP Disability Resources and Services. The Illinois Telecommunications Access Corporation, or ITAC program, provides eligible residents in Stephenson, Winnebago, DeKalb, and Boone counties with a free iPad, cell phone or landline phone designed to help with communication needs.



To qualify, applicants must be Illinois residents with a permanent speech disability, have active phone service, complete an application and loan agreement, and provide certification from a speech-language pathologist. The iPad package includes Wi-Fi capability, 64 gigabytes of storage, a 10.9 inch display, USB-C charging, and a protective OtterBox case.

For more information or to apply, contact RAMP at 815-968-7467 or email Jessica Wexell at jwexell@rampcil.org.



GALENA & US GRANT MUSEUM GETS MAJOR GIFT

The Foundation for Northwest Illinois is investing \$575,000 to help complete construction of the new Galena and U.S. Grant Museum. Foundation officials say the funding closes a key gap in the final phase of the \$6.5 million project, which is expected to open later this summer.

The new 8,500-square-foot facility next to the historic Nelson Stillman House will feature interactive exhibits, a climate-controlled archival room, and space for more than 14,000 historical artifacts. The museum will also be fully ADA accessible.

Foundation leaders say the project will strengthen tourism and economic development throughout Galena and Jo Daviess County, while preserving local and national history for future generations. Officials say the expanded museum is expected to significantly increase annual attendance and visitor activity in the region.

JO DAVIESS COUNTY TRANSITIONING TO NEW EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM



Residents in Jo Daviess County will notice a change in the county's emergency alert system. Beginning Wednesday, May 13th, anyone previously signed up for the CodeRED Emergency Alert System should receive a notification from Motorola that their information has been transferred to the new Rave 911 Emergency Notification System.

The Jo Daviess County Office of Emergency Management says the switch to Rave 911 will improve emergency alert coverage and strengthen communication with residents during severe weather, public safety incidents, and other emergencies.

Officials are encouraging residents to review and update their user profiles once they receive the notification email to ensure they receive the most accurate and relevant alerts.



STELLANTIS PREPARES TO REOPEN BELVIDERE PLANT

Stellantis is unveiling a new five-year turnaround strategy aimed at boosting sales and rebuilding confidence after posting a \$26 billion net loss in 2025. During an investor event in Michigan, CEO Antonio Filosa announced the company's "Fastlane 2030" plan, which includes 60 new global vehicle models by the end of the decade.

In North America, Stellantis plans to introduce 11 new vehicles, including several priced under \$40,000. The company says Jeep, Ram, Peugeot and Fiat will become its core global brands.

The plan also includes future production at the Belvidere assembly plant. UAW Local 1268 officials say production of the Jeep Cherokee and Jeep Compass is expected to begin there in June of 2028.

RFD ADDS NEW DESTINATIONS

The Chicago Rockford International Airport is expanding its lineup of tropical getaway destinations for early 2027. Airport officials announced the return of seasonal flights to Cancun, Mexico, and Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic, along with a new route to Liberia Guanacaste, Costa Rica.

The flights will be offered through Apple Vacations and related travel companies, with both flight-only and vacation package options available.

Flights to Cancun begin January 23rd, Punta Cana service starts January 24th, and Costa Rica flights launch February 5th. Airport officials say the added destinations respond to growing demand for convenient vacation travel from the Rockford region.

The announcement follows a record year for RFD, which served more than 310,000 passengers in 2025.



LEGISLATURE APPROVES AMENDMENTS TO COLLEGE CAMPUS PRESS ACT

Illinois is on track to become the first state in the nation to specifically protect the editorial independence of journalists working at public radio and television stations affiliated with state colleges and universities. Lawmakers have approved House Bill 4420, which now heads to Governor JB Pritzker for consideration.

Supporters say the measure creates a firewall between universities and public media newsrooms by preventing administrators or lawmakers from reviewing content before it airs or is published.

The legislation would apply to stations like NPR Illinois and Tri States Public Radio in Macomb. Advocates say the bill is designed to protect freedom of the press and shield public media journalists from political pressure at a time when concerns about academic and editorial independence are growing nationwide.

CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUPS CHALLENGE PROPOSED NICOR RATE HIKE

Consumer watchdog groups are urging Illinois regulators to reject most of a proposed \$220 million rate increase requested by Nicor Gas. Advocacy organizations including the Citizens Utility Board and Illinois PIRG say the utility's proposal relies on excessive infrastructure spending, high shareholder profit rates, and costly executive bonuses.

If approved, the increase would raise residential gas bills by nearly \$6 a month beginning in 2027. Consumer advocates say more than 200,000 Nicor customers are already behind on payments, with over \$74 million past due.

Nicor says the investments are necessary to maintain reliable service and meet growing energy demands across Illinois. The Illinois Commerce Commission is expected to make a final decision on the rate request later this year.





STATE LAWMAKERS CONSIDER BAN ON GLOCK PISTOLS

Illinois lawmakers are considering new gun legislation that critics say could effectively ban the future sale of Glock-style handguns in the state. A House committee approved a bill targeting semiautomatic pistols with a cruciform trigger bar design, which supporters say can be modified with illegal switches to create machine guns.

Democratic Representative Justin Slaughter called the measure a consumer safety proposal aimed at reducing gun violence, while gun rights advocates, including the National Rifle Association, argue the bill unfairly targets legal gun owners and may face constitutional challenges.

Lawmakers also advanced a separate proposal that would change mental health evaluation requirements for people seeking to regain their Firearm Owner Identification cards after treatment. Gun rights groups say current state law may discourage some people from seeking mental health care.

TIMBER LAKE PLAYHOUSE OPENS THEIR SEASON WITH GODSPELL

Opening weekend is underway for “Godspell” at Timber Lake Playhouse in Mount Carroll. The beloved musical officially opens Friday, May 29th as part of the theater’s 2026 summer season and 65th anniversary celebration.



Based on the Gospel of Matthew, “Godspell” features a series of parables told through music, comedy, and storytelling, including the hit song “Day by Day.” Theater officials say the production brings together a talented cast and creative team for a fresh take on the classic Broadway musical.

Performances continue throughout opening weekend, with additional shows scheduled during the theater’s summer season. Tickets and show information are available here: <https://www.timberlakeplayhouse.org/ticket>.



Preserving Practice: Jams and Jellies

PRESERVING PRACTICE: JAMS AND JELLIES AT U OF I EXTENSION

University of Illinois Extension is inviting area residents to sharpen their food preservation skills during a hands-on workshop in Freeport. “Yes, You Can: Preserving Practice – Jams and Jellies” will take place Saturday, May 30th from 9 a.m. to noon at the Extension Office in Building R at Highland Community College.

Participants will learn the basics of making jams and jellies, including the science behind gel formation and techniques for creating safe, flavorful spreads at home. The class also includes a kitchen session where attendees will prepare their own jar of jam to take home.

The cost is \$25, and advance registration is required through University of Illinois Extension.

PANCAKE BREAKFAST AT ALBERTUS AIRPORT

The Northwest Illinois Airshow is inviting the community to breakfast at the airport next month.

A Pancake Breakfast Fly-In and Drive-In is scheduled for Saturday, June 6th from 9 a.m. to noon at Albertus Airport in Freeport. Organizers say the event will feature pancakes, scrambled eggs, sausage, hash browns, coffee, orange juice and more, while visitors can also check out aircraft arriving at the airport.

The breakfast is part of activities connected to the Northwest Illinois Airshow and includes a special VIP line for pilots who fly in.

Admission is \$12 for adults, \$7 for children ages 5 to 12, and free for kids under 5.

Albertus Airport is located at 1255 East Airport Road in Freeport. More information is available at NWairshow.com.



FREEPORT LIBRARY KICKS OFF SUMMER READING PROGRAM

The Freeport Public Library is getting ready to kick off its 2026 Summer Reading Program with a community celebration on Monday, June 8th. The Summer Reading Kick-Off Party will run from 1 until 3 p.m. at the Art Plaza across from the library in downtown Freeport.

Children who sign up for the program during the event will receive a free book, and families can enjoy crafts, games, temporary tattoos, and other activities. Library officials say this year's summer reading theme is "Unearth a Story," encouraging readers of all ages to explore books and learning throughout the summer.

The Freeport Public Library says summer reading programs help students stay engaged academically during summer break while promoting literacy and creativity. In case of rain, the kickoff party will move inside the library. More information is available by contacting the Freeport Public Library at (815) 233-3000 or information@freeportpubliclibrary.org

MUSIC UNDER THE STARS CONCERT SERIES PREPARING FOR SEASON

The Freeport Concert Band is preparing for another summer season of Music Under the Stars at Koenig Amphitheater in Krape Park.

The 2026 concert series begins Sunday, June 14th at 7 p.m. with conductor Renee Schultz and performances by the Children's Choir and local musician Jacob Dickman on Alto Sax. Concerts continue weekly through July 26th featuring guest vocalists and instrumentalists from around the region.

A special patriotic concert is planned for July 5th at 7 p.m., sponsored by Tri Star Metals, with guest speaker Tim Connors and a performance by Battery G of the Second Illinois Light Artillery.

The Freeport Concert Band performances are free and open to the public. Attendees are encouraged to bring lawn chairs or blankets for evenings of live music in the park.

 MUSIC UNDER THE STARS 2026 CONCERT SCHEDULE <small>Join us Sunday nights at 7:00 p.m. at the Koenig Amphitheater in Krape Park for another season of Music Under the Stars!</small>		
JUNE 14, 2026 Conductor Renee Schultz Children's Choir Jacob Dickman, Alto Sax Sponsored by Angela Damin-Jewell Insurance	JUNE 21, 2026 Conductor Scott Stich Vocalists Michelle Stubbe & Derek Simons Emily Stich, Bassoon Sponsored by Burke-Tubbs Funeral Home	JUNE 28, 2026 Conductor Bill Petersen Vocalist Ava Chandler Sponsored by Foresight Bank
PATRIOTIC CONCERT - July 5, 2026 - 7:00 p.m. - Sponsored by Tri Star Metals		
Conductor Scott Benson Speaker Tim Connors	Haley Hamilton, Tenor Sax Battery G, 2nd Illinois Light Artillery	 <small>Building Business, Tomorrow & Today</small>
JULY 12, 2026 Conductor Travis Cunningham Vocalist Lucy Schneiderman Chip Braker, Tuba & Nancy Lehman, Piccolo Sponsored by Walker Mortuary & Winter Construction	JULY 19, 2026 Conductor Tom Huber Vocalists George Espino & Natalie Haas, Clarinet Sponsored by Helm Group	JULY 26, 2026 Freeport Early Jazz Society Conductor Bill Petersen Sponsored by Bocker Chevrolet GMC, Inc.
<small>Special thanks to the Freeport Park District and the Stewart Centre for their ongoing support.</small>		

IN CLOSING...

Before we sign off this week, we'd like to ask all of you for something we know you have: your opinion. Freepod has been broadcasting the news you've been missing for over 2 years now and we want to hear from you about how we're doing. We have compiled a survey that takes about 5 minutes to complete. Please give us your feedback so that we can continue to improve and better serve our community. We will start compiling results June 5th, so please fill out the survey before then. <https://forms.gle/4bDqzGLpT5oq3SMc8>

As we wrap up this week's show, we'd like to remind you all to listen to this past week's interview. Freepod host Tim Connors flew out to Lititz, Pennsylvania to speak with their former mayor, Tim Snyder. The two Tims worked together to create a sister city program built on both towns' history with pretzels.

This coming Tuesday, Becky Connors shares her conversation with Ferol Labash and Kourtney Kraft from Parkview Home. Ferol and Kourtney spoke to Becky about new developments and upcoming plans for the storied retirement home in Freeport. That interview will be available starting at noon on Tuesday, June 2nd. 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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