



**15 Feb
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Welcome to FREEPOD, a local news source for everyone in the Freeport area. This weekly podcast is brought to you by a large volunteer group dedicated to providing to objective, unbiased news specific to our community.

We're getting more listeners every week, and much of that is thanks to you. Please share about us on your social media and thank you for your enthusiasm – now here's news you've been missing.

Highland ag program success

Agriculture is one of the most important businesses in Stephenson County and Highland Community College is helping to ensure its positive future. At a recent College Board retreat, full-time instructors Justin Ebert and Monica Pierce reported that enrollment in agricultural programs increased from 182 in 2017 to 395 in 2024. Over the past several years about 750 high school students have also been enrolled in Highland Ag courses through the dual credit program.

The various programs represented in Highland Ag include transfer and non-transfer degrees. Currently, over 60% of Ag students are on the bachelor's/transfer pathway, although the trend is shifting slightly toward applied science programs including Ag Science, Ag Business, and Crop Science and Technology, as well as the new cannabis certificate program.

Phase one of a sub-surface irrigation project on the plots is being completed this winter as part of a proposed two-year initiative which includes the construction of a storage building. The gradual expansion of the 55-acre HCC Ag Research Plots is on land shared with University of Illinois Extension.

Stephenson County Clerk recognition

Stephenson County Clerk and Recorder Jazmin Wingert was recently recognized by Fidar Technologies, a vendor who provides software for vital records such as birth information and land records. She was named the new clerk of the year, out of 13 in the state of Illinois, due in part to her focus on digitizing land records.

Jazmin also signed up the most veterans for the company's honors awards program. This program provides incentives for veterans to get discounts at local businesses in participating counties. Congratulations, Clerk Wingert!

For more information, contact the County Clerk's office.

Housing Authority update

The Housing Authority of the City of Freeport is a federally subsidized, not-for-profit program, offering safe, secure housing for eligible low-income individuals and families. To clear up some recent potential confusion, the Brewster and Hosmer buildings have not been purchased by Ansonia, a Chicago-based multiple-family property management and construction company.

Both of these buildings were part of the Rental Assistance Demonstration rehabilitation program, or RAD, from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, also known as HUD. This program funded remodeling in 2016 and 2017 and the investor handling the initiative chose the Winnebago County Housing Authority to manage these Freeport buildings.

However, in mid-2023 the Winnebago County Housing Authority handed management back to the Housing Authority of the City of Freeport, who in turn voted to retain Ansonia to manage the two buildings since they are not sufficiently staffed for the task. The decision was strictly a Freeport Housing Authority decision; the City has no jurisdiction over Housing Authority actions. The City serves only to appoint commission members.

The Freeport Housing Authority owns 196 rental units ranging from one- to five-bedrooms in three developments around Freeport. The only Freeport buildings that are managed by Ansonia are Brewster and Hosmer. The rest of the buildings are managed by the Housing Authority.

Open house for nursing careers

FHN and Highland Community College in Freeport are holding an open house for Highland's Certified Nursing Assistant or CNA program for individuals interested in becoming a CNA to talk with students and instructors from Highland's Nursing and Allied Health programs as well as representatives from FHN.

The event will be held from 2 to 5 pm on Wednesday, February 21 at the Ray and Betty Stamm Health Science Nursing Wing of HCC's Natural Science and Health Center in Building N, as in nursing.

Candidates can register for the CNA program that night. Staff will be available to help with financial aid, placement testing, and any paperwork necessary to get started and new students could begin classes as soon as March 11.

For more information, contact the basic nursing program at Highland.

Freeport Pretzel men's basketball standing in NIC-10

Freeport High School's young men's basketball team is showing major improvements this season and could be a top team in the NIC-10.

Last year, the team's record was 7-11 and they finished in seventh place in the Northern Illinois Conference, or NIC-10. This year, the Pretzels have been in second place for most of this season.

The Freeport Pretzel Varsity Team has two freshmen who play a major role in the team's success. Kazion Moorehead starts for the team and helps make an impact with his playmaking and tough shots. Isaiah Baker comes off the bench and leaves a mark on the game in rebounding and scoring in the paint. Detric Macon, a senior this year is one of the team's leaders and has been a major success story officially scoring 1000 points earlier this year. Only a handful of people in the NIC-10 have accomplished this goal.

Assistant Principal Reuben Cooper has been watching the NIC-10 games for a long time and he's impressed with how well the team plays together. Coach TJ Jackson said the team wants to compete for a NIC-10 championship and are making strides to do that this year.

The Pretzels will play in the Illinois High School Association regional tournament this month.

This story was provided by the Broadcast Journalism class at Freeport High School. We're excited to partner with the school on FREEPOD stories!

Pearl City raffle drawing

Somebody left Pearl City this past Thursday night with a lot more money than when they started the day. A lucky person finally won about \$192,000 in the Queen of Hearts drawing at Little John's Tap.

Sponsored by the Pearl City Lions, the drawing had gone on for a year with no one picking the Queen from 52 cards on a board. Rolling over weekly with every incorrect guess, the pot had grown to \$275,000 and was down to three cards left. The Lions get \$83,000 as their share of the fundraiser.

Park District family dances

Dads and their young daughters once again celebrated a night out together at the Candyland Ball this past Friday in Freeport. This year was special as the event celebrated its 30th anniversary making special memories of dressing up, going out to dinner and dancing the night away.

Moms and their sons will have their chance on February 23 at the Moms and Me Masquerade Dance. Call the Freeport Park District for reservations for the Moms and Me event.

Olivo Taco opens brick-and-mortar location in Freeport

Another drop-in restaurant is opening in Freeport! There's a ribbon cutting ceremony for Olivo Tacos this Friday, February 16th at 11:30 a.m. at their new location at 116 West Douglas St. This is the corner of Douglas and Galena in the building previously occupied by Munchies and 312 Beef and Sausage who both moved to other locations in town.

Olivo Taco previously served Freeport with a food truck and their Freeport shop is their third brick-and-mortar location in northwest Illinois joining others in Rockford and Belvidere. They have seven food

trucks in Rockford and others in Nevada and Arizona. Rockford-based brothers Mahmud and Said Zatar celebrate peace, love and tacos through their menu, including their famous three-tacos-for-five-dollars deal.

United Way Community Impact Grants process opens

The application process has opened for Requests for Proposals, or RFPs, for the 2024-2025 Community Impact Grants from The United Way of Northwest Illinois (UWNIL). The RFPs are for Education, Financial Stability, Health, and Basic Needs in Stephenson, Jo Daviess and Carroll Counties. Funding will cover the period of July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025. In 2023, United Way funded over \$247,000 towards local Community Impact Initiatives.

Community Impact RFP application forms will be available online at the United Way's website until March 10th, 2024. The grants are open to previously funded United Way Partner Agencies but in addition to the RFPs, the United Way will be accepting Letters of Interest from programs that have not received funding in the past. Letters of Interest are also available at the website.

Questions regarding RFPs and Letters of Interest can be directed to Connie Kraft, director of the United Way of Northwest Illinois.

Looking ahead...

There's lots coming up on our calendar!

For starters, we'll be reporting on high schools competing at state levels – we're rooting for all of them!

Highland Community College is celebrating February as Black History Month with an evening of music at "Jazzin' It Up for PEACE." This free event will be held at 7 p.m. on Friday, February 16 (that's tomorrow, folks), at Highland's Ferguson Fine Arts Center. The concert features Cole and Company, the SOGN Productions family, and a collaboration with Music Instructor Dr. Randy Haldeman and the Highland Chamber Singers. No tickets are needed, and remember...this is FREE!

Then this Saturday, February 17th, you'll want to check out Cupcakes and Cocktails at Big O's on the Hollow just out of town on Route 75. This annual fundraiser for the YMCA Strong Kids program lets you enjoy four different cupcakes paired with four different cocktails for just \$15 – or six of each for just two dollars more. The event also includes auction items. Sounds tasty to us!

We're looking forward to the fifth annual Arctic Ale and Art Walk too, hosted by the Greater Freeport Partnership on Saturday, February 24 from noon to 4 pm in downtown Freeport. More than 20 participating businesses will feature a local artist and the opportunity to taste a favorite beer or cider. We'll have more on this event next week.

Looking back in time, Alan Wenzel will present the program "The Last Great American Train Robbery" on Tuesday, February 20th. A retired Highland Community College instructor, Mr. Wenzel will tell the story of the daring heist and how, beginning in the 1970s, the robbers gained folk-hero status when their exploits were given renewed national attention. The free program is part of the Lectures on American History series hosted by the Freeport Public Library Foundation. It will be held in Freeport Public Library and begin at 6:30 pm on Tuesday.

Finally, looking ahead for FREEPOD, we're committed to ensuring that all our listeners know about candidates for this year's local and regional elections. Beginning later this month, we'll be hosting **5 Questions in 5 Minutes** interviews with candidates in contested races for the March 19th election. Each of these candidates will be invited to take just five minutes with one of our hosts to answer the same five questions, giving you the opportunity to compare their messages and be informed quickly and conveniently. We'll report the schedule as calendars are confirmed.

Until next week...

FREEPOD is proud to be part of a growing movement to stop and reverse the decline of local news sources in Illinois, and we invite you to tune in for news about Freeport businesses, City plans and progress, area rewards and recognition, local impacts related to state and national news, and more.

As we've said before, FREEPOD couldn't come to you without the help of many local supporters. As always, we're especially appreciative to the Mass Communications Department at Highland Community College for all of their help producing this podcast, and to our many liaisons and reporters for the time they volunteer to bring the news to you. Thank you, Highland and Team FREEPOD!

If you have story suggestions or would like to donate to support FREEPOD, check out our website at www.freepod.org.

***Check back next week for more news you've been missing
and thank you for listening!***