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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 new 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.

More on street repairs

At the January 16 Freeport City Council meeting, City Manager Rob Boyer recommended approval of an intergovernmental agreement with Stephenson County. The agreement, which has been approved, will include 500,000 dollars for the project from the County. Those dollars are part of non-allocated funds granted to the County as part of American Rescue Plan Act signed into law in March 2021.

This project will fund the complete mill and overlay of Locust Avenue, from South Street to Lincoln Boulevard. The agreement states that the city would initially fund the project and then be reimbursed by the county.

We will report on more street projects in future episodes of FREEPOD.

Never too early for...pickleball!

Pickleball is fast becoming one of the country's most popular games and with Freeport temperatures firmly in the 40's or even higher for the near future, people may be itching to go outside and get active. For pickleball fans, that's great news since the pickleball courts at Krape Park are open for play as long as they are clear of ice and snow.

If the 40s are still too cool for you, Fitness Lifestyles and the YMCA have inside courts to practice your pickleball prowess.

The sport combines elements of tennis, badminton, and ping-pong. Freeport resident and local pickleball fan Erin Dahms says she enjoys the game and especially loves the people she spends time with

on the court. Says Dahms, “Everyone is so nice and I have made many new friends through pickleball – but my mom is still my favorite partner.”

According to the Sports and Fitness Industry Association the number of people playing pickleball grew by 159% since 2019 to nearly 9 million in 2022, and its popularity continues to grow. It got its start in 1965, but only recently skyrocketed everywhere including right here in Freeport.

More at the Park District

Speaking about nice weather and parks, patrons of Freeport’s award-winning park system will see a number of exciting changes during 2024.

In addition to the great pickleball courts at Krape Park, a new, one of a kind mini-golf course will reopen there in late May. The course is called Wing It and will incorporate pollinator habitat including one hole with a live plant arbor through which golfers will walk, another in the shape of a butterfly, and yet another called the quarry hole.

Also in Krape Park, plans are progressing for a paved multi-purpose trail linking the Yellow Creek Nature Path to Forest Rd. to the west. The path will follow the south bank of the creek with design plans being finalized in May of this year.

Golfers will appreciate the newly refreshed clubhouse at Park Hills, complete with a redesigned grill and kitchen space along with a full bar and expanded food and drink offerings.

In one other update, 150 trees of various species will be planted in Taylor, Read, and Krape Parks as part of a grant from the Morton Arboretum in Lisle, a suburb of Chicago. Planting will be completed in spring of 2025.

“The Park Board of Commissioners and I are extremely excited about bringing these projects to residents and visitors during the 2024 season”, said Ron Schneider, Executive Director of the Freeport Park District.

Food for Fines

Do you have outstanding library fines? All during February, the Freeport Public Library will accept donations of non-perishable food items as payment for overdue book fines. Each food item donated will result in a \$1 reduction in late fees. This is an excellent opportunity to clear library fines while contributing to a worthy cause.

All donations go to the Freeport Area Church Cooperative Food Pantry. Suggested items for donation include sauces, soups, beans, honey, peanut butter, juices, sauces, and fish packed in oil. The Freeport Area Church Cooperative Food Pantry serves individuals and families who are experiencing food insecurity so don't miss out on the opportunity to give back to the community while clearing up Library fines.

If you turn your books back in on time, this is an opportunity for you too! Even if you don't have any pending overdue book fines, take a moment to scan your pantry and consider dropping off non-perishable food items at the Library.

Regional Spelling Bee in Freeport

Even though it's still winter, a bee will be buzzing next week when the Regional Spelling Bee takes flight at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 13, in the Highland Community College Student Conference Center, Room H201. The event is free and open to the whole hive, er, we mean public.

Twenty-four students are competing in the bee, two each from 12 schools within Jo Daviess, Stephenson, and Carroll counties, which is the area covered by Regional Office of Education 8. The winner will advance to the Scripps National Spelling Bee in Washington, DC, in May. That's a honey of a prize!

The Regional Office of Education is seeking donations to help offset the cost of the trip to the national bee for the winner and their family. Contact Laura Heath at 815-599-1408 to donate: that's 815-599-1408 or find the number at the show notes for this episode of FREEPOD. Good luck to all of the students spelling up a storm next Tuesday at Highland!

Trash Pickup Update

February 17th marks one year since Gills Freeport Disposal became Freeport's only residential trash pickup service. After a short adjustment period, service has been smooth except for harsh weather days which required halting service and pushing it back one day.

Gills also now operates the transfer station near the Stephenson County fairgrounds. Gills drivers collect recycling items on routes every two weeks and those items are taken for sorting at a different facility. A list of what can be recycled is at gills freeport disposal.com

Valentine's Day is next week

Are you one of those people standing in the crowded card aisle on February 13, looking at picked-over Valentines? If so, consider this is your advance notice: Valentine's Day is next week!

Many shoppers prefer traditional red roses to profess their true love, and they are the bestselling Valentine's Day flowers. An estimated 250 million are grown every year just for this occasion.

Local florists are preparing for the holiday with roses at the ready. Brooke Deininger at Deininger Floral in downtown Freeport says it is their biggest day of the year. With a dozen roses costing over \$100, she says they will also sell a wide variety of arrangements that include roses and other blooms to accommodate any budget. Deininger's, Country Girl Floral, and local grocery stores all offer an assortment of options.

If flowers aren't your thing, jewelry, chocolates, candy, or a romantic dinner are other top Valentine's Day gifts. Area retailers and restaurants are running specials for the holiday, so you still have plenty of time to find something perfect for someone special.

Looking ahead...

The Freeport Community Concert Association is providing area residents with two opportunities to enjoy classical music at affordable prices. The first is Sunday February 11th when the group "Yu and I" will play violin and classical guitar. The second is scheduled for March 3rd when the Sinta Quartet will present classical saxophone selections.

Marjorie Phillips, chairperson of the Community Concert Association, is excited to share this musical talent with her community. She says, "I think people will really enjoy Yu and I at our first concert. Yu is South Korean and I, which is short for Inez, is German. Both are well established in their own countries and have toured around the world. They have entertained many audiences throughout the USA and now they'll be making fans in Freeport! We are thrilled to bring them to our hometown."

Tickets are \$10 for each concert, and students are invited to attend for free. Both performances are at 3 p.m. at the Masonic Temple in downtown Freeport. Mark your calendar for some great concerts on February 11th and March 3rd.

To close on an historical note, we note that on Valentine's Day in 1855, Freeport was granted a charter of incorporation as a City by the Illinois General Assembly. Happy Valentine's Day, Freeport!

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.

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!***