



Hello and welcome to FREEPD. I'm Amy Fisher...

And I'm Matt Mullen...

In this week's episode, the city of Freeport releases their new strategic plan...

Galena announces the planned demolition of a historic building to help alleviate parking issues...

And Highland's annual Juried Art Exhibit opens up for entries.

This is Freepod for January 22nd, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

CITY OF FREEPORT RELEASES STRATEGIC PLAN

The city of Freeport has released an updated strategic framework for 2026 to 2028. The document serves as an outline of priorities and goals for the city as they move towards a 2040 vision statement.

The new framework builds on previous strategic plans and highlights priority areas for city leadership. Included among those priorities are a safe and inclusive community, neighborhoods and housing, reliable and strong infrastructure, economic development and land use, and a vibrant arts and culture experience.

Specifics of the plan include taking a three-pronged approach to public safety, utilizing community service officers, social workers, along with traditional law enforcement. City leaders also want to continue the Re-Fresh Freeport program that focuses on tackling blight in the city.

To see the full report, please visit bit.ly/FreeportSP.



FREEPORT PARK DISTRICT GETS IDNR GRANT

The Freeport Park District was awarded a grant worth half a million dollars by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to improve the features at Krape Park.

As part of the Open Space Land Acquisition and Development program, or OS-LAD, the park district will use the \$582,445 to pursue projects such as improving ADA-accessibility in the park, two new playgrounds, and infrastructure improvements like lighting and signage.

Work on these projects is anticipated to begin this summer with the goal of completion by December 2027.



HCC AWARDED GRANT FOR TRAINING FUTURE EDUCATORS

Highland Community College wins a grant to help recruit and support future educators. The grant, titled the Disadvantaged Male Teacher Initiative, will give the college \$30,000 to help identify and support diverse, community-connected individuals who aspire to become teachers.

The grant is provided by Grow Your Own-Illinois, but funded by the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

Highland's Dean of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Fine Arts, Rae Schupbach-Roe, and educational psychology instructor, Dr. Narjis Hyder, spearheaded the application process.

The college says that this grant aligns with their broader commitment to equity, access, and workforce development.



DARIN STYKEL RECEIVES COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARD

Darin Stykel from Fehr-Graham was recently given the Community Impact award by Freeport City Manager Rob Boyer.

Stykel has served as both a consultant and project manager for many of the city improvement projects over the last several years, including cleaner drinking water initiatives and roadwork projects.

Congratulations, Darin.

GALENA APPROVES DEMOLITION OF HISTORIC POLICE STATION TO BUILD PARKING RAMP

As anyone who has ever shopped the main drag in Galena can tell you, parking is at a premium in that historic city. And in light of this problem, the city of Galena has now approved the demolition of its historic police station to make way for a parking ramp.

The building, found at 312 N. Main St., was built in the 1910s, and would require nearly \$3 million in repairs and improvements to keep it in use. Instead, the city and Jo Daviess county officials are working on an agreement to fund the \$2.3 million needed to convert the lot in to a 50-space parking deck.

Galena City Administrator Matt Oldenburg says that the city currently has just over 200 parking spaces on Main Street, so the addition of another 50 is significant.

The project was rejected by the city's Historic Preservation Commission; however, Galena officials still plan on pursuing the change, envisioning one to two years to see the work come to completion.



STATELINE AREA



CRIMESTOPPERS ASKS FOR HELP IN SOLVING STORAGE UNIT THEFTS

Stateline Area Crime Stoppers is asking for your help to solve a string of burglaries that occurred in Rock City in the early morning hours of January 12th.

According to the Stephenson County Sheriff's Office, an unidentified suspect or suspects cut the locks off of five storage units and entered those units. No information is currently available as to what may or may not have been taken.

The facility in question did have security cameras, and the Sheriff's office has provided stills of both the Jeep Grand Cherokee and at least one masked suspect involved in the crime.

To see those images, or to submit any tips that could be useful in the investigation, please visit <http://www.statelineareacrimestoppers.com/>.

CHANGES TO SNAP RULES BEGIN FEBRUARY 1

Starting February 1st, new rules take effect for people utilizing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP benefits.

The new rules require able-bodied adults without dependents to work, volunteer, or train for 80 hours per month to receive benefits. They also expand the age range of people subject to the rules. Previously, individuals who were 55 and over were exempt. Under the new rules, individuals must be older than 64 to be exempt.



The Illinois Department of Human Services encourages anyone currently receiving SNAP benefits to update their profile on the IDHS website and use the department's online screener tool to check your eligibility under the new law. Link to Screener: <https://aberp.illinois.gov/screener/ABAWD?lang=EN>.



HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN ENROLLMENT DEADLINE EXTENDED

Illinois residents still shopping for health insurance coverage now have more time to choose a plan.

Officials at Get Covered Illinois, the state-run health insurance marketplace, have extended the enrollment deadline to January 31st for anyone seeking coverage to begin on February 1st.

Due to expiring federal subsidies, experts are expecting premiums for Affordable Care Act plans rise dramatically in 2026. While the US House has recently passed a bill that would extend those subsidies, the bill has yet to be voted on by the Senate or signed by the President.

To learn more or to sign up for coverage, please visit GetCoveredIllinois.gov.

USDA REPORTS GROWING GAP BETWEEN COSTS TO PRODUCE AND PRICE RECEIVED FOR US CROPS



The USDA has released a report showing that while crop farmers in Illinois are paying more to produce, they are not seeing an equivalent rise in their sales profits.

According to data collected through surveying producers, the price index has been steadily declining for up to three years. But experts warn to not sound the alarm too quickly. According to Nick Paulson, an agricultural economist with the University of Illinois, part of the concern with the pricing index is offset when you consider the current index is being compared to the index from 2011, an unusually profitable period.

So, while Paulson does acknowledge that the level of financial stress for farmers is real, it is also important to keep it in the greater context.

Paulson encourages farmers to focus on efficiency of inputs; specifically noting that as products like fertilizer are becoming more expensive, a closer look at application rates can help weather the storm and offset some of the loss.

HIGHLAND ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS FOR JURIED ART EXHIBIT



Highland Community College has put out the call for entries to their 55th Annual District Juried Art Exhibit. The exhibition is open to anyone 18 years of age or older living in the Highland district or currently attending the college.

Original works can be either two-dimensional or three-dimensional, must have been completed in the last two years, and have not been previously exhibited at the Highland gallery.

The deadline for submissions is January 28th with the opening reception and awards ceremony happening on February 11th. For more information about the contest, please visit <https://highland.edu/finearts/highland-gallery/juried-art/>

SHOWTIME FUNDRAISER AT CANNOVA'S

Showtime 46 is getting ready at Freeport High School, and you can support the students while getting some good grub at Cannova's.

The FHS Jazz Band will be performing at Cannova's on February 9th at 5 p.m. with a raffle happening upstairs at the same time.

Proceeds go to help the FHS Showtime group cover expenses of traveling to Tennessee to perform. To reserve a table, call Cannova's at 815-233-0032.





PARK DISTRICT DANCES REGISTRATIONS NOW OPEN

It's that time of year where the Freeport Park District is set to host a couple of special dances for children and their parents or significant adults.

The Candyland Ball, which is an annual dance for girls 13 and under to attend with their dad or significant adult, will take place on February 13th from 6 to 8:30 p.m. at the Masonic Event Center. While the Mom and Me Masquerade gives boys 13 and under the chance to spend a special evening with their mothers, and that event happens on February 27th.

Pre-registration for both events is required and will cost \$16 for residents and \$17 for non-residents. You can register for the Candyland Ball by February 11th or the Mom and Me Masquerade by February 25th by following this link: <https://bit.ly/candylandballmomandmemasquerade>.

SENSORY SCIENCE AT SEVERSON DELLS

Severson Dells Nature Center is hosting Sensory Science on February 7th from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The event allows children to touch, smell, and listen to the nature that surrounds us.



The event is free and no pre-registration is required.

This event is part of Severson Dells's on-going Science Saturdays programming, which offers a different opportunity each month for kids to explore the scientific world with hands-on, minds-on activities.



GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT BEGINS

Area residents are invited to participate in this year's Great Backyard Bird Count on February 14th starting at 1 p.m. at the Krape Park Community Building.

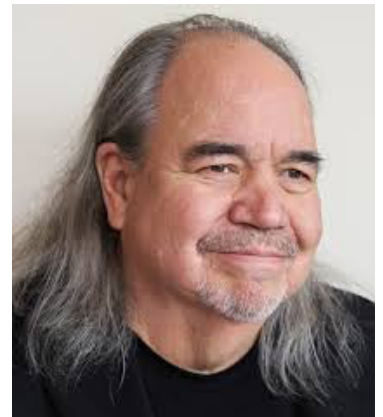
The annual event started in 1998 and has become one of the largest citizen science bird-counting opportunities available.

Registration is not required, but the local sponsor of this event, the Northwest Illinois Bird and Nature Alliance, does ask that you them in advance, so they can send out a notification in case of cancellation. nwilbirdnaturealliance@gmail.com

ILLINOIS POET LAUREATE PRESENTING IN GALENA

Galena LitFest is hosting the Illinois Poet Laureate for a special evening of poetry and conversation.

On January 29th from 6 to 8 p.m., residents can hear from Mark Turcotte, who was named Illinois's 6th Poet Laureate back in July. Turcotte has published multiple books, as well as being featured in literary journals and anthologies, while also serving as a Senior Lecturer and Distinguished-Writer-in-Residence at DePaul University.



Turcotte's presentation will be held at historic Hess House in Galena, but will also be available via Zoom. You can find the registration for that virtual presentation here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/galena-lit-fest-the-work-of-poetry-with-il-poet-laureate-mark-turcotte-tickets-1964572347777?aff=oddtcreator>.



NEW MENTAL HEALTH OFFICE IN MT. CARROLL

A new mental health option is opening up in Mt. Carroll.

The Mt. Carroll Chamber of Commerce will host a ribbon cutting and open house for the new offices of Kinder Mind, a nation-wide mental health provider, on January 31st at 10 a.m.

The offices are located at 811 South Clay Street in Mt. Carroll and provide counseling services both in person and virtually.

U OF I EXTENSION OFFERS FREE PROGRAM ON SELF-CARE FOR CAREGIVERS IN OGLE COUNTY

The University of Illinois Extension Office is putting on a free workshop for local caregivers to discuss the challenges they face and offer up some practical ways to avoid burnout and take better care of themselves along the way.

Family Life Educator Kara Schweitzer will lead the program taking place on January 28th at 10 a.m. at the Rock River Center in Oregon.

Caregivers provide a wide range of support, while many have no formal training. It can be a meaningful and fulfilling task, but it can also bring on a lot of stress and tough emotions. Through this program, the Extension Office is hoping to offer real help for those who give so much to help others.



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

IN CLOSING...

Before we close out this week's podcast, we remind you to check out the special weekly interview we posted this past Tuesday. Freepod host Alan Wenzel spoke to Will Clark, founder and creative director of 815 Natives, a Freeport-based media production company. Will highlighted his personal journey to entrepreneurship as well as shared some advice on how other local, young professionals can get started with launching a business in Freeport.

This coming Tuesday, Tim Connors will talk to Lance Ferguson. Along with operating Davis & Company Professional DJ Services, Lance is a very active member of the Freeport community, serving in volunteer positions across multiple organizations. Tim's interview with Lance will be available on our website, www.freepod.org, or wherever you get your podcasts from on Tuesday, January 27th, starting at noon.

We'd also 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 Mass Communication department at Highland Community College for producing this podcast.

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site at www.freepod.org.

This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.



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