



**15 May
2025**

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 updates on what's happening in our community.

You can find us on Facebook as well as our website (www.freepod.org) and the website of our NPR partner WNJI Northern Public Radio (www.northernpublicradio.org), so please visit us there and continue to share about us on your own social media. Now let's see what's happening.

Service awards presented by Highland Community College

Nearly 200 guests recently gathered at Highland Community College's Ferguson Fine Arts Center for "A Night at the Theatre" gala hosted by Highland Community College and its Foundation. The evening highlighted the arts and raised over \$20,000 to support students in need, including significant pledges from Marjorie Phillips and the Community Foundation for Northwest Illinois, each of whom contributed \$6,000 to the Helping Overcome Personal Emergencies (HOPE) Fund.

Dan Dick, Executive Director of the Highland Foundation, outlined the Foundation's vision to further invest in students' success and Highland President Chris Kuberski celebrated the College's continued enrollment growth, recent program additions, and major capital improvements.

Two prestigious awards were also presented. David Shockey received the Delbert Scheider Lifetime Achievement Award. A long-time supporter and leader, Shockey has served the College as a Foundation Board member, Trustee for 18 years, and now as an emeritus member of the Foundation board. Alan Wenzel was honored with the Patricia Dunn Timeless Service Award, recognizing nearly four decades of dedicated service to the College. His influence has positively impacted every corner of Highland's district. Alan is also a FREEPOD host, and we congratulate him for this honor!

Highland announces Commencement Keynote speaker

In other Highland Community College news, the College has announced that Tamisha Bonvillain, FHN nurse practitioner and Highland alum, will deliver the keynote address at its 62nd Annual Commencement Ceremony this Saturday, May 17th at 10:00 a.m. on the Highland campus.

One of Highland's "Distinguished Alumni" and a beloved local healthcare provider, Bonvillain brings more than two decades of service, inspiration, and advocacy to this special occasion—made even more special as her son, Daeshon Verner, will graduate as part of Highland's Class of 2025.

Bonvillain, a Board-Certified Family Nurse Practitioner, has dedicated over 22 years to serving the Freeport community. She's a familiar face in local initiatives such as FHN's "Walk with a Doc" program, has been a guest speaker for Highland's Women in Science Club, and is a steadfast supporter of Highland's Nursing Department, where she has mentored student nurses during clinical rotations.

In recognition of her professional excellence and contributions to the college, she was named one of the College Foundation's Distinguished Alumni Award in Fall 2024, distinction held by fewer than 200 of the nearly 18,500 students who have earned degrees and certificates at Highland.



As Bonvillain prepares her speech, she does so with the confidence that comes from experience on a big stage. A Chicago Bears superfan, she recently took the national stage during the 2025 NFL Draft in Green Bay. Selected to announce the 233rd overall pick, she proudly proclaimed the Bears' newest running back, Kyle Monangai from Rutgers University, in front of a crowd of over half a million fans.

Highland Community College invites the community to hear from Bonvillain and celebrate its graduates this Saturday at 10:00 a.m. For more information, visit www.highland.edu

New student registration at FSD145

New student registration is now open for incoming kindergartners and students who are new to Freeport School District 145. Current school district preschool students who will be kindergartners in the fall do not need to register at this time. More information can be found on the home page for the Freeport School District at <https://www.fsd145.org>, including links for registration in both English and Spanish.

Stephenson County celebrates International Museum Day

In celebration of International Museum Day this Sunday, May 18, the Greater Freeport Partnership invites everyone to explore the museums of Stephenson County that preserve and showcase the region's stories and culture.

Participating Museums included the Cedarville Area Historical Society, the German Valley Historical Society Museum, Lena Area Historical Society, McConnell Area Historical Society, Rock Run Country Historical Society Museum, Silver Creek Museum, Stephenson County Historical Society, and Winslow Historical Society and Museum.

With all this local history at your fingertips, FREEPOD hopes you will plan to spend part of your Sunday visiting one or all of these unique museums that truly offer something for everyone. For more information, visit greaterfreeport.com and search on “International Museum Day” or go directly to greaterfreeport.com/intlmuseumday.

Stephenson County Historical Society plant sale

Today marks the start of the annual perennial plant sale at the Stephenson County Historical Society. Both sun and shade plants will be available, as well native plants and tropical succulents and house plants, all locally grown and at reasonable prices. Just a few of the types of plants available include hostas, iris, lilies, peonies, ground covers, woodland shade plants, bulbs, as well as many more. A limited amount of tomato plants will also be available.

The sale benefits the Historical Museum, and they encourage garden enthusiasts to come early for the best selection. The sale is open until 4:00 this afternoon, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. tomorrow, and 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Saturday at the Historical Society Museum at 1440 South Carroll Avenue in Freeport.

County Fair books available

The Stephenson County Farm Bureau has Fair Books for the 2025 fair. The books, which include information about dates and times for judging events as well as entertainment and business vendor details, are available for pickup Monday through Friday from 8:00a.m. to 4:30p.m. at the Farm Bureau office at 210 W Spring Street in Freeport. Be sure to save the July 22nd through the 26th for this year’s County Fair. New this year, daily admission will include grandstand access! To learn more visit www.stephensoncountyfair.org.

New member of YWCA La Voz Latina team

My name is Cecilia Van Heeren has joined the YWCA La Voz Latina team. This organization provides a wide range of services, including access to justice, an immigrant family resource program, and an Illinois Welcoming Center. Van Heeren can be reached at 815-904-2117, and more information on the organization, which is located at 1225 West Empire Street in Freeport, can be found at www.ywcanwil.org/la-voz-latina/

Chainlink Cyclist rides

The Chainlink Cycle group is once again opening their rides to the biking public, including their Thursday night Cyclepath bike rides and Saturday morning Bike Shop Rides.

For the Thursday Night Cyclepath Ride, plan to meet at the Krape Park Marina just before 5:30 PM every Thursday evening. Riders cycle at about 10 to 12 miles per hour, which is conversation pace ride, on a 10-mile round trip, usually to Florence Station. For some variety, the group hosts ice cream rides, beer rides, pumpkin rides or even mosquito rides throughout the season.

The group also meets at 8:00 a.m. every Saturday morning at PHK Bicycles in downtown Freeport on Adams Street for the Bike Shop Ride. This ride is usually a 24-mile trek to Dakota and back at a pace of about 12 to 16 miles per hour and includes a few challenging hills. The official ride is on paved roads, but intrepid bikers can choose an alternate gravel route for the last few miles. There is also a shortcut for those only having time for a 16-mile route. All cyclists are welcome to join both free rides.

Look at the stars!

For an experience that literally is out of this world, visit the Doug Firebaugh observatory in Freeport, the best place in town to get a look at the stars and the planets thanks to the telescopes and imaging equipment available there. The observatory is open this coming Saturday at 8:00 p.m. and every first and third Saturday from May to October. An astronomy presentation begins each night and then visitors can view the cosmos themselves.

The observatory is located at 2892 W Stephenson Street near the Park Hills maintenance shed. Donations are welcome, and more information is available at 815-291-3072 or on the observatory's Facebook page. That's 815-291-3072 or the Doug Firebaugh Observatory page on Facebook.

The week ahead...

As we end this week's newscast, we wanted to share some exciting news for FREEPOD. At the most recent meeting of 100 Women Who Care, FREEPOD was nominated and received their quarterly gift of approximately \$12,000. We are so grateful to this community-building organization and the generous women who support it. Our board is already creating a plan as to we will maximize that money in the coming weeks to strengthen our products and increase our regional audience. Thank you very much indeed, 100 Women Who Care!

In looking ahead to this weekend, don't forget the Cub Foods Brat Stand. This group working the stand this week is the Salvation Army and they're ready to fire up the grills with brats, burgers, hot dogs, and ribeye sandwiches you can grab on the go from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. both tomorrow and Saturday.

If you are looking for something to do this week or any week, visit the Greater Freeport Partnership website at www.greaterfreeport.com and click on "weekly events" for a comprehensive listing of many more entertainment and dining events and activities throughout Stephenson County. You can also subscribe to the City of Freeport's monthly newsletter at their website, www.cityoffreeport.org. We have links to both in the print version of FREEPOD episodes.

In closing...

In closing, if you haven't already done so, be sure to listen to this week's in-depth interview where FREEPOD host Alan Wenzel will talk with Freeport Mayor Jodi Miller, City Manager Rob Boyer, and Chief of Police Chris Shenberger about their recent State of the City report that outlines progress on the City's 2020-2024 Strategic Plan for 2020 through 2024. The interview is available online and can be listened to anytime.

Alan also hosts next week's in-depth interview with Mike Schindler of Classic Cinemas' Corporate offices about the summer movie blockbuster season and how they see the movie business in coming years. This interview will post at noon on Tuesday May 20th and be available to listen to then or at any time after that – just head to our website or your favorite podcast platform to select the programs of your choice.

As always, FREEPOD couldn't come to you without the Mass Communication Department at Highland Community College and our community liaisons and reporters. Thank you, Team FREEPOD! You can always find us on our Facebook page or the website of our National Public Radio partner, WNII in DeKalb, at www.northernpublicradio.org. For more info, including how to make a tax-deductible contribution to support our work, visit our website at www.freepod.org.

With that, time's up for this week. Tune in again next Thursday at noon for more about what's happening in Freeport and thank you for listening!

Listen next week for more about what's happening in the Freeport area!

LINKS TO OTHER COMMUNITY EVENTS NEWSLETTERS

To find something to do this week or any week, visit the Greater Freeport Partnership website at www.greaterfreeport.com and click on "weekly events" for a comprehensive listing of many more entertainment and dining events and activities throughout Stephenson County. You can subscribe to their free weekly newsletter there too, and we have a link to a QR code in the print version of this newscast if you'd like to sign up that way.



While you're signing up for more of what's going on in our community, you can also subscribe to the City of Freeport's monthly newsletter at their website, www.cityoffreeport.org, or by using their QR code that appears below