



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

And I'm Matt Mullen...

In this week's episode, Congressman Eric Sorenson aims to bring more than \$4 million in federal funds to Albertus Airport...

Dakota Softball brings home a state title...

And the Tutty Baker 5K is looking for runners and walkers.

This is Freepod for June 11th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

SORENSEN SEEKS \$4M IN FEDERAL FUNDING FOR ALBERTUS AIRPORT

Freeport's Albertus Airport could see a major infrastructure upgrade if a new federal funding request is approved.

Congressman Eric Sorensen joined Freeport city leaders Friday to announce plans to seek approximately \$4 million in federal funding to extend city water and sewer service to the airport on the city's southeast side. The airport, owned by the City of Freeport and in operation since 1945, currently lacks those essential utilities.

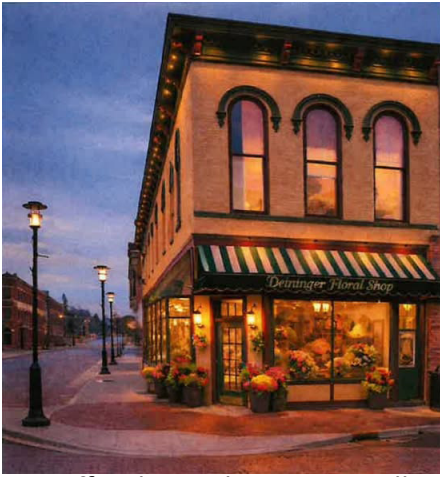
City Manager Rob Boyer says the project would improve safety by providing a reliable water source for firefighting operations, reducing the need to rely on tanker trucks during emergencies.

Officials say the improvements could also open the door for future aviation-related business development. Sorensen noted that expanded infrastructure could help attract aircraft maintenance operations and other employers, creating new skilled, good-paying jobs in the region.

According to Sorensen's Fiscal Year 2027 Community Project Funding request, the airport infrastructure expansion proposal seeks up to \$4.5 million to support future commercial aviation activity and economic growth.

The funding request will now move through the federal appropriations process, where it will compete with projects from across the country for final approval.





DEININGER FLORAL RECEIVES FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT GRANT

Downtown Freeport revitalization efforts continue with another local business receiving support through the City’s 2026 Façade Improvement Grant Program.

Deining Floral Shop, located at 1 West Main Street, has been awarded funding to enhance the exterior of its historic downtown building. Planned improvements include the installation of a decorative awning and new lighting beneath the awning; upgrades designed to improve the building’s appearance while maintaining its historic character.

City officials say the project will strengthen curb appeal, encourage additional investment in the downtown district, and help attract more visitors to the area.

The Deining Floral project is one of seven properties selected for the City of Freeport’s 2026 Façade Improvement Grant Program. Earlier this year, the city announced more than \$57,000 in grant awards to support building improvements aimed at boosting economic development and preserving the character of downtown Freeport.

Construction timelines for the improvements will be announced by the property owner and city officials.

FHS STUDENT GARDEN PROGRAM EXPANDS

The Freeport Student Garden is getting a major boost thanks to a new grant award aimed at expanding its impact in the community.

The program has received a \$75,650 grant that will fund the purchase of a truck, refrigerated trailer, walk-in cooler, shipping container, and the construction of a pavilion over its outdoor wash station. Organizers say the upgrades will improve food safety, increase produce storage capacity, and reduce waste.

The Freeport Student Garden provides hands-on agricultural experience for local youth while supplying fresh fruits and vegetables to area families. During the growing season, the program delivers an average of 200 pounds of produce each week from mid-June through October.



The grant will also create additional job opportunities for teens in farming, produce packaging, and logistics. Organizers say the improvements will strengthen the garden’s ability to support local food pantries and the Northern Illinois Food Bank while continuing its mission of youth education and community service.



FREEPORT ART CONTEST LAUNCHES

Local artists are being invited to showcase their talents as the City of Freeport launches an art contest tied to America’s 250th birthday celebration.

Artists working in a variety of mediums, including painting, drawing, sculpture, and more, are encouraged to submit original works that reflect the nation’s upcoming semiquincennial. Organizers note that entries created with artificial intelligence or submitted as photographs will not be accepted.

Artwork must be delivered to Freeport City Hall by June 30, along with the artist's name and email address. The winning entry will be recognized during the annual Tutty Baker Fest on Saturday, July 11.

The contest is part of Freeport's celebration of the nation's 250th anniversary, which will be officially observed in 2026. City officials say the event is an opportunity for local artists to share their creativity while helping commemorate a historic milestone in American history.

NIGHT SKY EVENTS WITH FIREBAUGH OBSERVATORY

June is shaping up to be an exciting month for skywatchers across Northwest Illinois.

According to NASA, several celestial events will be visible this month, beginning June 9 when Venus and Jupiter appear in a close conjunction in the evening sky. From June 11th through the 15th, Mercury joins the pair shortly after sunset, creating a rare three-planet viewing opportunity.

On June 17th, observers can watch as the moon passes in front of Venus, creating a striking pairing in the western sky. Then on June 21st, the summer solstice marks the longest day of the year and the official start of astronomical summer in the Northern Hemisphere.

Locally, the observatory at Firebaugh Observatory will be open to the public on Friday, June 20, beginning at 8 p.m., rain or shine. Visitors can view planets, stars, and other celestial objects through the facility's telescopes.



SIGN UP FOR PICKLEBALL AT KRAPE PARK

Pickleball players of all ages will have another opportunity to sharpen their skills this summer at Krape Park.

The Freeport Park District is now accepting registrations for Session Two of its pickleball lessons, designed for both beginners and players looking to improve their game. Youth lessons for ages 8 and older begin at 5 p.m., followed by adult lessons at 6 p.m.

Park District officials say the program focuses on fundamentals, strategy, and skill development while providing a fun and welcoming environment for players of all experience levels.

Pickleball continues to be one of the fastest-growing sports in the country, combining elements of tennis, badminton, and ping pong. Organizers encourage individuals, friends, and families to participate together.

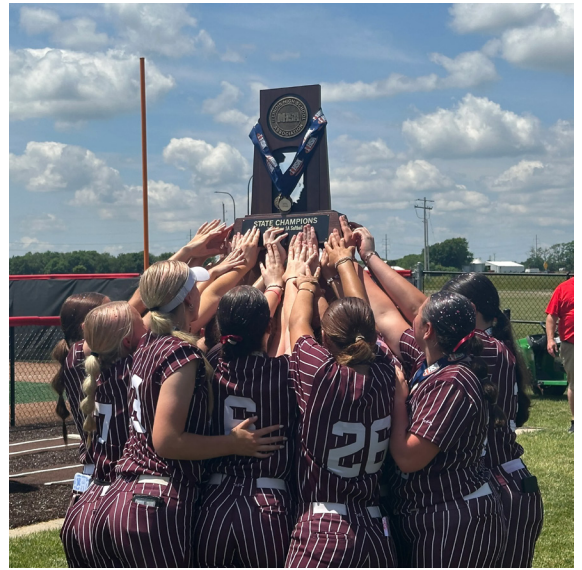
Registration is required by June 12. To sign up, call 815-235-6114 or visit https://webtrac.freeportparkdistrict.org/webtrac/web/search.html?Action=Start&SubAction=&_csrf_token=qj0R6B-0Z1Z022E4S1U3N2R5B5J5X5K531D5N3S575H1K6X6D585J1H6K5W593Z096T5S4C6G0G015V0168015U5D59546C724L6F48040763555L6Z655X4O521H4S4N54&primarycode=&keyword=pickleball&keywordoption=Match+One&display=Detail&module=AR&multiselectlist_value=&arwebsearch_buttonsearch=yes&fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAynJpZBExbDhKcWV3aFZSV2J4cXhseXNydGMGYXBwX2lkEDlyMjAzOTE3ODgyMD-A4OTIAAR6VbQfCNW5eKx9yBV3CQWCUCjVmKgE7p9kquplgAmeRETV7tleRIEC2PG-E7g_aem_inEbTa7-upc2trH-BhaLTXw

DAKOTA SOFTBALL WINS STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

The Dakota Indians are state champions once again.

Dakota High School captured the Illinois Class 1A Softball State Championship last weekend, capping off an impressive postseason run and bringing home the program's latest state title. The Indians topped Waltonville 2-1 in the championship game, with Dakota pitcher AJ Howarth only giving up 4 hits throughout the game.

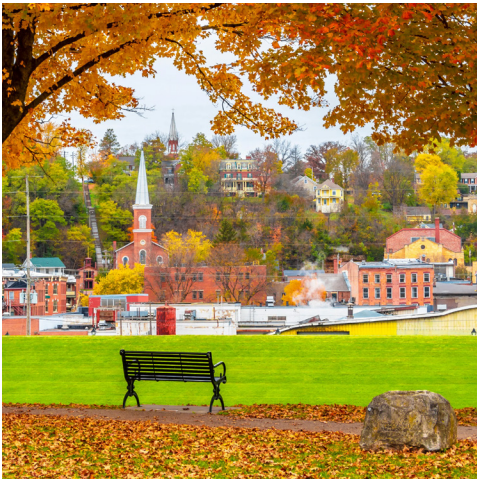
The final contest was a nail biter, with the winning run coming in the top of the final inning after Hailey Kerchner hit what should have been a routine single, but led to two mistakes from Waltonville that allowed Kerchner to come all the way home for the winning run.



Dakota's championship victory is the first in softball in the school's history and gives Northwest Illinois yet another reason to celebrate on the statewide stage.

Players, coaches, and fans gathered following the final out to celebrate the achievement, which capped a season marked by strong pitching, timely hitting, and consistent play throughout the tournament.

The state championship is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the Dakota softball program and its support from the community.



GALENA NAMED RUNNER-UP FOR BEST SMALL TOWN IN THE MIDWEST

The City of Galena is once again receiving national recognition.

USA Today's 2026 10 Best Readers' Choice Awards recently named Galena a runner-up for Best Small Town in the Midwest. The publication praised Galena's rich history, scenic location along the Mississippi River, and its walkable downtown filled with locally owned shops, restaurants, and historic attractions.

Galena, home to just over 3,300 residents, is no stranger to national accolades. In recent years, it has been recognized by HGTV as one of America's most charming small downtowns and was named by Travel and Leisure magazine as one of the nation's most beautiful small towns.

Galena Country Tourism President and CEO Terry Mattson says the recognition reflects the community's commitment to preserving its historic character while investing in its future.

The latest honor adds to Galena's growing reputation as one of the Midwest's premier destinations for history, shopping, outdoor recreation, and tourism.

HANOVER FIRE DEPARTMENT RECEIVES STATE GRANT

The Hanover Volunteer Fire Department is receiving state funding to help purchase needed equipment.

The department has been awarded just over \$16,000 through the Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshal's 2026 Small Equipment Grant Program. The program distributed \$6 million statewide to 260 fire departments, fire protection districts, and EMS providers to help purchase equipment that local agencies might otherwise struggle to afford.



Hanover was one of only a handful of departments in Northwest Illinois selected for funding. State officials say the grants are intended to strengthen emergency response capabilities and improve public safety in communities across Illinois.

Governor JB Pritzker and State Fire Marshal Michele Pankow say the program helps ensure first responders have the tools and resources needed to protect their communities.

The Hanover Volunteer Fire Department serves residents in Hanover and surrounding areas of southern Jo Daviess County, responding to fires, rescues, and other emergencies throughout the year.



ILLINOIS LEGISLATURE AIMS TO REDUCE SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING TO CHILDREN

Illinois is moving closer to new protections for children online.

Lawmakers have approved the Children's Online Social Media Safety Act, a measure designed to limit addictive features and harmful content for users under 18. The bill passed unanimously in the Illinois Senate and overwhelmingly in the House and now heads to Governor JB Pritzker, who has pledged to sign it.

Under the legislation, social media platforms would be required to use age information provided through a device's operating system and apply stronger privacy protections for minors. The measure would limit algorithm-driven content, prohibit overnight notifications between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m., and restrict access to a child's precise location.

Supporters say the bill helps protect young people from addictive online features and harmful content. Critics, including some technology industry groups, argue the measure could face constitutional challenges.

If signed into law, the new requirements would take effect in 2028.

ILLINOIS SCHOOLS GET MODERATE RAISE IN FUNDING

Illinois lawmakers have approved a new state budget that increases funding for public schools by \$350 million through the state's Evidence-Based Funding formula.

The spending plan, which now heads to Governor JB Pritzker for his signature, provides additional resources to the school districts considered furthest from adequate funding levels. Lawmakers also restored \$47 million for property tax relief grants, a program that had been paused in the current budget year.



The budget includes more than \$10.8 billion for the Illinois State Board of Education and nearly triples funding for free school breakfast and lunch programs to \$26 million.

Education advocates welcomed the increase but say much more funding is needed. According to the Illinois State Board of Education, more than 500 school districts remain below 90 percent of their target funding level, and an estimated \$3 billion more would be needed to fully meet the state's adequacy goals.

The new fiscal year begins July 1.

PRITZKER VOWS TO SIGN SCHOOL CELLPHONE BAN



Governor JB Pritzker says he will sign legislation requiring Illinois school districts to adopt policies limiting student cell phone use during the school day.

The measure, known as Senate Bill 2427, would require public school districts to implement policies restricting the use of wireless communication devices during instructional time beginning with the 2026-27 school year. Exceptions would be allowed for medical needs, individualized education plans, emergencies, and other specific circumstances.

Supporters say reducing classroom distractions will help improve student focus, academic performance, and mental well-being. Similar restrictions have already been adopted by school districts across the country.

Pritzker called the legislation a common-sense step to help students stay engaged in learning and build stronger connections in the classroom.

If signed as expected, Illinois school districts will spend the coming year developing and implementing local policies before the law takes effect.

FOOD FIGHT AGAINST CANCER AT THE WAGNER HOUSE

One of Freeport's most popular charitable events returns this week as the annual Food Fight Against Cancer takes place Thursday, June 12, at the Wagner House.

The fundraiser benefits the Mercyhealth Cancer Center in Freeport, helping provide support and resources for local cancer patients and their families. The event brings together area restaurants, businesses, and community members for an evening of food, fellowship, and fundraising.

Organizers say proceeds stay local, helping patients access care and services while undergoing cancer treatment. The event has become a longstanding community tradition and a major source of support for cancer-related programs in the region.

The Food Fight Against Cancer will be held at the Wagner House in Freeport on June 12. Community members are encouraged to attend and help make a difference in the lives of local families facing cancer.

Additional event and ticket information is available here: https://www.mercyhealthsystem.org/foodfight/?fbclid=IwY2xjawSSdSFleHRuA2FlbQlxMABicmlkETFmSIVZRnB5OVp1b0FqY21zc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM-5MTc4ODlwMDg5MgABHt3n808OUItFdZodFPOeSanNagRhk_s5pb5VnqYluTnYTv8oZdrsNwKSBL_Q_aem_IXft-1M552PLeYyrSO1XU3A



FREEPORT FIND FEST IS FAST APPROACHING



FREEPORT FIND FEST
CITY-WIDE GARAGE SALE

Three Days. One City. Endless Finds.
June 18, 19, 20

CALLING ALL FREEPORT RESIDENTS
REGISTER YOUR SALE SO SHOPPERS CAN FIND YOU!

WHY JOIN?
1. Make Extra Cash while Cleaning Out Your Home
2. Be Included on the Event's Official List & Map
3. Help Start a New Freeport Tradition!

city of **freeport**
Illinois

LET THE ANTIQUING & TREASURE HUNTING BEGIN!

Bargain hunters and garage sale enthusiasts will have plenty to explore later this month as Freeport launches its first-ever Find Fest, a citywide garage sale event.

The Freeport Find Fest will take place June 18th through the 20th, with participating sales running from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day. Residents are encouraged to host their own garage sales or spend the weekend searching for hidden treasures throughout the city.

Organizers say the event is designed to create a new community tradition while helping residents earn extra money and connect with neighbors.

A complete map of participating locations and listings of items available at each sale can be here: https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?fbclid=IwY2xjawR0GVtleHRuA2FlbQlxMABicmlkETFjbVllbmE3bFVEed-DR6c0pZc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHtqCrB6SNiZetvSQeoGfGWTivbVWAZ1sp-Loy-own0f2lrnEZYdFxl8hcOcgi_aem_z4liZghB8rcpPHCsVYMb0A&mid=1yPHemrmtKyBGpJ104kFxeNI-T174I64&ll=42.28275244834464%2C-89.60994345&z=13. Residents who would still like to host a sale can also register through June 12th at this link https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScgqPwwLfXguBILohtsXaJCA2DnY-9JKXeyQLZ_Qrm4WNCIERA/viewform?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAYnJpZBExbDhKcWV3aFZSV2J4cXhseX-NydGMGYXBwX2IkEDlyMjAzOTE3ODgyMDA0OTIAAR7qksRF1tFU5Y4iUKDmYmLMugnrONxuZy3awJJCZ5D5lo-9eJj_zuwCZv9cCHg_aem_ArjxFDw8SNJKq108YaZCDg

City officials hope the inaugural event will draw shoppers from across the region and become an annual summertime tradition in Freeport.

UNITED WAY DAY OF ACTION

United Way of Northwest Illinois is gearing up for its annual Day of Action, and organizers are still looking for community projects in need of volunteer support.



UNITED WAY
Northwest Illinois

The Day of Action takes place June 25 and brings together volunteers from Stephenson, Jo Daviess, and Carroll counties to complete projects that strengthen local communities. Nonprofits, schools, municipalities, and community organizations can submit requests for help with tasks such as landscaping, painting, organizing, assembling kits, or improving community spaces.

Volunteers will be matched with projects throughout the region, creating what organizers call a ripple effect of positive change.

Part of a global United Way movement launched in 2008, Day of Action focuses on building stronger, healthier, and more resilient communities through hands-on service.

Individuals and organizations interested in submitting a project or volunteering can find more information here: <https://uwni.org/day-action>. Organizers encourage requests to be submitted soon as the June 25 event approaches.



YOUTH BICYCLE SAFETY DAY

Area youth are invited to brush up on their bicycle safety skills during Youth Bicycle Safety Day on Saturday, June 27, at the Winnebago County Fairgrounds in Pecatonica.

The free event runs from 10 a.m. to noon in Building 4 at the fairgrounds, located at 500 West First Street. Participants will rotate through a series of hands-on safety stations covering bicycle inspections, helmet fitting, riding in traffic, rules of the road, intersection safety, and proper hand signals.

After completing the stations, riders will take part in a group ride around the fairgrounds. The day concludes with a free lunch of hot dogs, chips, and drinks provided by the Pecatonica Lions Club.

As an added bonus, two participants will win brand-new bicycles courtesy of The Bicycle HUB.

Registration is available by calling 815-986-4357 or by visiting this link: go.illinois.edu/bikerodeo

UNPLUG ILLINOIS

Families are invited to put down their phones and head outdoors for Unplug Illinois Day at Krape Park in Freeport, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, July 11th.



The event encourages people to take a break from screens and reconnect with nature, family, and friends through a variety of outdoor activities. Participants can try fishing along Yellow Creek, navigate a chalk obstacle course, join a family fitness class at the amphitheater, create crafts, and enjoy a selection of sports equipment available for use throughout the day.

Organizers say a limited number of fishing poles will be available to borrow, and anyone age 12 or older who plans to fish must have a valid Illinois fishing license.

The event will also feature raffle prizes for participants, with winners announced at 1:30 p.m., along with light refreshments while supplies last.

Unplug Illinois is a statewide initiative promoting healthy, active lifestyles through outdoor recreation and exploration of local parks and natural areas.



TUTTY BAKER 5K

Runners and walkers are invited to lace up their shoes for the annual Tutty Baker Fest 5K on Saturday, July 11, in downtown Freeport.

The family-friendly race begins at 8 a.m. on the Pecatonica Prairie Trail, with a shotgun start at Tutty's Crossing Trailhead. Registration and packet pickup begin at 7 a.m. Race organizers say proceeds from the event will benefit Friends Forever Humane Society.

The cost is \$30 for adults and \$15 for children ages 14 and under. Participants who register by June 25 are guaranteed an event T-shirt, while supplies last.

Awards will be presented to the top overall male and female finishers, along with top finishers in multiple age divisions.

The 5K is part of the larger Tutty Baker Fest celebration, a three-day community festival featuring live music, food vendors, a parade, family activities, and other events honoring Freeport founder William “Tutty” Baker.

Sign up here: <https://runsignup.com/Race/IL/Freeport/TuttyBakerFest5K>

IN CLOSING...

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 spoke to John Grider of Mac & Cheese Antiques in Stockton. Tim and John talked about the antiques business and what makes Mac & Cheese Antiques such a great place for people to visit.

This coming Tuesday, Becky Connors will share her conversation with Barb Eberle of St. Vincent de Paul, a local Catholic based charity. That interview will be available starting at noon on Tuesday, June 16th. 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.

As always, please like us on Facebook, subscribe on the podcast platform of your choice, and share with your friends. If you’d like to make a tax-deductible contribution to support local news content, please visit our website at www.freepod.org.

This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.



FREEPOD

The news you've been missing.