



23 October
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.

Freeport's Electrical Aggregation Program

FREEPOD reported last week on the electrical aggregation program efforts underway in Freeport. To provide further information on this topic, the City is asking citizens to watch for a letter with the City logo at the top that every household will receive in the next week or so. There are four different variations that residents could receive, and most will receive one that asks them if they'd like to opt out. It is very important to understand that if recipients do nothing with this letter, they **WILL** be enrolled in the City's electrical aggregation program.

As we outlined last week, if you are enrolled in the program, you will see on your monthly bill that the **Delivery** of your electricity is still controlled by Ameren/ComEd. What this program offers is a different rate for the section of your bill titled **Supply**. If that section says Ameren/ComEd, you may experience a fluctuating rate. If that section shows the company name MC Squared Energy, that means that your rate is fixed for the duration of the agreement.

Last week we reviewed the different in pricing per kilowatt hour between the Ameren/ComEd. Please refer to last week's article in the print version of the October 16th episode at www.freepod.org/scripts for details and more information on the difference between the prices and why those differences exist.

Because of the importance of understanding that you will be part of the electrical aggregation program ***unless you opt out***, let's quickly review the four different ways you can opt out if you decide that's a better option for you. There will be a QR code in each mailing that you can scan and complete without having to talk to anybody and be opted out in a matter of seconds. Each letter also includes an online link that will take you to the same page which again, you can complete in a matter of seconds. These two electronic methods are preferred as they are both quicker and more expedient as well as easier to track for confirmation. The other two options are to call the toll-free phone number that will be in the letter or return the signed card included in each envelope.

The City also reminds residents that this method of selecting your home's supply of electricity was voted into implementation by residents as the result of a 2012 referendum. The City has since then received hundreds of phone calls with questions about the legality of the process when residents receive letters requiring their decisions. For those wanting more information about how this works legally, check out The Illinois Power Agency Act, otherwise known as the IPA Act, Chapter 20, Section 1-92 at <https://www.ilga.gov/Documents/legislation/ilcs/documents/002038550K1-92.htm>

For more information on this topic, the City has provided a short video on the City website that you can find by searching on "electrical aggregation" at www.cityoffreeport.org or at <https://cityoffreeport.org/electrical-aggregation-program-information-on-letters-and-more/> And be sure to watch for your letter in the mail and remember that you will automatically be enrolled in the electrical aggregation program if you do not opt out using one of the four options outlined in the letter.

New Community & Economic Development Director for Freeport



The City of Freeport welcomes Gertrude Heimerdinger as its new Community & Economic Development Director. Originally from Pearl City, she graduated with a Bachelor's of Science in Architectural Science from the University of Illinois and a Master of Architecture from Lawrence Tech University. She spent six years at a Dubuque architectural engineering firm before coming to Freeport for this position.

Welcome, Ms. Heimerdinger!

Highland Community College approves planning for Sports Complex expansion

The Highland Community College Board of Trustees has approved planning for the expansion of the Sports Complex facility, authorizing the administration to move forward with planning, designing, and permitting for future renovations of the current Sports Complex into an athletic and learning center. Once the planning and design are complete, the Board will be presented with a request for approval of the necessary bids, as well as any bonding resolutions necessary for financing of the cost of the project. The budget for the expansion will not surpass the current estimated cost of \$38,000,000, which was determined through a feasibility study conducted in 2022.

The expansion will significantly enhance the College's academic programs, support increased enrollment, and foster long-term sustainability efforts as it provides additional opportunities to excel in both academics and athletics and help to attract new students. The updated facility will also help the College address challenges of the nationwide decline in traditional college-age students.

The Sports Complex Building, which was first occupied in early 1980 by Highland and the YMCA, was constructed to meet the space needs of both entities at that time. In 1980, the YMCA did not offer

childcare and HCC only had four athletic teams. Now the YMCA provides childcare services to over 100 children, with hundreds of slots still needed in northwest Illinois and Highland has 11 competitive, nationally recognized men's and women's sports teams.

As the YMCA's original 50-year tenancy agreement with Highland nears its end, a joint task force formed by HCC and the YMCA determined that it was not feasible to create the amount of space required by both parties at the current location. Therefore, the YMCA decided it will vacate the Sports Complex Building, as well as the Child Care/Training Center, at the end of the tenancy agreement.

More information on the plans for both Highland and the YMCA will be covered in FREEPOD as they are finalized.

Stephenson County searches for a new coroner

Stephenson County is looking for a new coroner following the announcement by Stephenson County Board Chairman Scott Helms that County Coroner Brian Halverson has resigned.

The County Board says that because Halverson did not designate who should serve as acting coroner while a replacement is found, state statute temporarily designates the duties and responsibilities of the coroner's office to the sheriff's office so until a new coroner is selected, Stephenson County Sheriff Steve Stovall has appointed Chief Deputy Coroner Duane Collman as acting Stephenson County Coroner.

Because there are more than 28 months remaining in the term of the recently resigned coroner, the position will also appear on the ballot for the 2026 General Election.

A selection committee has been formed to find the county's next coroner. The committee will be led by Stephenson County Board Member Ronnie Bush and includes Stephenson County Board Member William Hadley, Sheriff Stovall, interim Freeport police chief Travis Davis and Robert Burke of Burke Tubbs Funeral Home.

Nicor under pressure to reduce rate increase

Two Illinois Commerce Commission administrative law judges have issued a recommendation to slash a proposed \$314 million Nicor Gas rate increase proposed for approximately 2.3 million customers across northern Illinois, including Freeport, by more than a third. Nicor filed in January for the rate hike, the largest gas rate increase in Illinois history, saying it needed to replace aging infrastructure and update technology to serve its customers.

Administrative law judges have recommended that the Illinois Commerce Commission reduce Nicor's request by over \$100 million, bringing the increase down to \$204 million. The Citizens Utility Board, known by the acronym CUB, and other consumer advocates are urging further cuts to the proposed rate hike, arguing that even the reduced amount is too high and noting that it would be the utility's fifth rate hike in just eight years.

If the judges' recommendation is approved, the average residential customer would see an increase of roughly \$7.70 per month or about \$92 per year. The new rates would go into effect in early 2026. The Commission is expected to issue a final ruling in November.

Area business closes

Zurn Elkay Water Solutions will close its Savanna facility and transfer employee positions to its existing locations in Lanark and Freeport. According to a company statement, the need for costly roof repairs and space limitations led to the decision to move positions from the Savanna plant to its other northwestern Illinois facilities. A total of 178 positions at the Savanna facility are impacted, and everyone has been offered the opportunity to transfer. These transfers have begun and will continue through the end of December.

The decision has Savanna leaders concerned about the community's future and has already changed daily life for many residents. For those taking transferred positions outside Savanna, their commute has increased from perhaps 10 or 15 minutes to a half-hour or more.

The company went on to confirm that Zurn Elkay is committed to northwestern Illinois, noting that in their expanding operations in Lanark and Freeport they have produced drinking fountains and bottle filling stations that delivered over 1.2 billion gallons of filtered drinking water and prevented 9.6 billion single-use plastic bottles from being sent to landfills in just the first half of 2025.

Dry harvest season

Harvest is well underway in Northwest Illinois and farmers have been out in the fields mostly nonstop for a few weeks. Stephenson County Farm Bureau Manager Victoria Hanson said the harvest season is moving right along locally, but only about 30 percent is finished statewide. The great weather has helped a lot, she said, since dry conditions have continued. Hanson also reminded area drivers there is farm equipment on the roads so please slow down, watch for equipment, and have patience. It is only a temporary inconvenience as harvest will be wrapping up soon.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has noted that large parts of the country are currently experiencing drought conditions. Northern Illinois has been drier than usual, but other parts of the country have been much drier.

For a map showing the conditions throughout the U.S. visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture website or click here:

<https://npr.brightspotcdn.com/dims4/default/e149cb9/2147483647/strip/true/crop/1910x1270+0+0/resize/1760x1170!/format/webp/quality/90/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fnpr-brightspot.s3.amazonaws.com%2Fa3%2F2f%2F585a47ec4e74a867f67ee90c46b8%2Fscreen-shot-2025-10-01-at-12-24-54-pm.png>

Freeport Public Library Executive Director resigns



Freeport Public Library Executive Director Ashley Huffines is leaving the Library, effective November 14th. Huffines states that her decision was based on many factors, and expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to have served in the role for the past seven years.

She noted that she has great confidence in the staff in handling operations as she departs and that Youth Services Administrator Amanda Meyers will be the Acting Director as the Library Board searches for a new director.

Thank you for your service, Ashley!

Cabinet Making: Abraham Lincoln's Political Arithmetic

Cabinet making requires skill...and we're not just talking about cupboards. A President's Cabinet is an important element in the administration and says a lot about the Chief Executive.

President Abraham Lincoln's Cabinet and the important role it played in bringing the States together during the most divisive period of the country up through the new Millennium is the topic of a special presentation by Samuel Wheeler, Ph.D., Director of History Programs for the Illinois Supreme Court Historical Preservation Commission next Thursday, October 30th at 6:00 p.m. at the Freeport Public Library. The event is a Richard F. Sokup Biennial Lecture presented by Freeport's Lincoln-Douglas Society.

Abraham Lincoln's Cabinet was remarkably diverse in background, experience, temperament, and political belief. Composed of former Whigs and Democrats, radicals and conservatives, abolitionists and moderates, it mirrored the divisions within what was then the young Republican Party. Lincoln understood that such diversity could be both a source of strength and a cause of tension. As President, he listened to contrasting perspectives not to forge consensus, but to ensure every constituency was heard, and he expected his Cabinet members to explain and defend his decisions to the factions they represented.

While Doris Kearns Goodwin's book *Team of Rivals*, celebrates the Cabinet as a model of collaborative leadership, Dr. Wheeler's talk reframes it as a study in political necessity, reviewing Lincoln's pragmatic use of diversity, representation, and coalition-building to preserve the Union and bring an end to slavery. The program is free and everyone is welcome.

The Lecture Series honors Sokup, a former Lincoln-Douglas Society president. Funds from his estate help pay for the series, which brings nationally renowned scholars to Freeport twice a year to discuss current research on Lincoln, Douglas, their 1858 debates, or general political topics in America.

League of Women Voters presentation on behavioral healthcare

Next Tuesday, October 28th, at 6:30 p.m. The Freeport League of Women Voters hosts a special presentation titled Behavioral Healthcare Crisis: Diagnosis and Treatment Options to review the challenges the country and the community face related to this topic. The presentation will be held at the Freeport Public Library.

Sherri Ausherman Holoubek, Professional Relations Coordinator, and Jamie Ditto Stockman, Outpatient Coordinator, will provide the presentation. Both are part of the Rosecrance Healthcare Group, FHN's partner for behavioral health services in northwest Illinois. In March 2024, the behavioral health services offered at FHN Family Counseling Center were transferred to Rosecrance Behavioral Health in Freeport. Rosecrance is a non-profit behavioral health organization with over 100 years of experience, providing treatment for mental health and substance use disorders across the upper Midwest. Following the presentation, there will be time for questions. The event is free and open to everyone.

The Power of Balance women's retreat

Next Saturday, November 1st, Pat Leitzen-Fye, Sara Horn, and Laurie Hasken present a women's retreat focused on the role of balance for body, mind, and spirit in aging not just gracefully but powerfully. The event is scheduled for 12:30 to 5:30 p.m. at Highland Community College. Cost for the program is \$50 and the registration deadline is next Wednesday, October 29th. For more information, email litezen54@gmail.com for the registration package and more information.



2nd Annual Native American Harvest Dinner

On Monday, November 10th Quiet Souls will host their second annual Native American Harvest Dinner at the Freeport Eagles Club. The event will begin with a wine tasting from Native Vines Winery at 5:30,



followed by a four-course Native American Traditional Foods Dinner at 6:30 and then a Friendship Dance led by traditional dancers in their tribal regalia in which all attendees are invited to participate. Tickets can still be purchased until next Thursday, October 31 by calling 815-297-2293 or at Riteway Furniture.

Details on the dinner menu – which includes turkey and wild rice soup, a Three Sisters salad, bison and specially prepared potatoes, and grape dumplings for dessert – can be found on the Freeport Quiet Souls Facebook page.

Once again, tickets are only available through next Thursday, October 31st and are \$50, with all proceeds benefiting the Native American Cultural Center in Freeport. Purchase yours by calling 815-297-2293 or stopping in at Riteway Furniture in Freeport. This sounds like a one-of-a-kind event not to miss!

Northwest Illinois Bird and Nature Alliance and RAMP Accessible Birding Event

This Sunday, October 26th, celebrate Birdability Week with the Northwest Illinois Bird and Nature Alliance from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the Krape Park Community Building near the boat ramp. The event is fully accessible to individuals and families of all ages and abilities. The event will be held rain or shine and is a free, open-house style event so you can come for part of it or the entire time.

The Northern Illinois Raptor Rehab and Education will have a "meet and greet" for their birds of prey during the entire event. There will a Slow Birding outing, also known as Mindful Birding, at 1:15 and 2:15 using paved trails and a Bird Sit at 2:00 p.m., focusing on birding by audio and using binoculars while remaining stationary, and arts and crafts with Sarah Tapper, Freeport Art Museum Director of Programs & Exhibitions.

This event celebrates Birdability[®] week, created to ensure inclusivity in Birding. According to their website, Birdability[®] Week is an annual celebration dedicated to birders with disabilities and other health concerns. It serves as a platform to share resources and ideas, fostering an accessible, inclusive, and welcoming birding community to help ensure that birding is a joyful and enriching experience for everyone. Learn more at www.birdability.org.



National Prescription Drug Take Back Day

FHN and the Freeport Police Department are hosting National Prescription Drug Take Back Day this Saturday, October 26th, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Freeport Police Department, 320 W. Exchange Street in Freeport.

This national event encourages national, state, and local law enforcement to provide a safe, convenient, and responsible means of disposing of prescription drugs and educate the public about the potential for abuse of medications as well as the danger of disposing of them through the sewer system where they could leech into groundwater sources. The community is encouraged to bring in unused prescription drug pill and patches (no liquids or needles/sharps, only pills or patches) for safe drive-through disposal service. No liquids or needles, please.

Trick or Treat

Halloween celebrations are in full swing! There are too many to list in their entirety, but here are a few you might want to be sure are part of your haunting plans.

This Saturday, October 25th, **Bootiful Saturday** will fill downtown Freeport from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Many stores will be participating in trick-or-treat, and the Lincoln Mall joins in the fun with their **Boo Bash** from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. If you're not tired yet, enjoy more treats and fun activities at Krape Park from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. with the **Trick-or-Treat Trail** that begins by the carousel.



The Stephenson County Antique Engine Club ***Train of Terror*** rides the rails one more time for this Halloween season on Saturday night, leaving from the Silver Creek Depot hourly from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m., taking passengers through a surreal realm haunted by ghosts, ghouls, vampires, zombies and other pillars of the undead community. What will you encounter with your \$10 ticket? An insane killer with a bloody machete and flaming torch? A ghost ship with a cannon-firing pirate crew? Imprisoned lost souls laboring away in an eternity of despair? All these have been seen in past years. Ride the train and find out... if you dare.



Also on Saturday night, don't forget ***Spirits of Yesterday*** hosted by The Stephenson County Historical Society from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. on the museum grounds at 1440 S. Carroll Avenue in Freeport. This family-friendly night of ghost stories, local legends, and eerie encounters highlight the darker corners of Stephenson County's past. It features stories from Wyatt Herrmann about ghost investigations across the region, a presentation by local author Terri Reid who is known for her Mary O'Reilly paranormal mystery series, and storytellers, spooky scenes, and themed activities throughout the grounds. Light

refreshments and warm drinks will keep the chills at bay. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$5 for kids ages 5 through 14, and those 5 and under are free. Tickets may be purchased at the door.

On Sunday, the Lion's Club is hosting a **Halloween bowling outing**, including a costume contest, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at Four Seasons Bowling. FREEPOD has also compiled a list of **impressive Halloween yard displays** ranging from the ghoulish to the glowing that we've included in the print version of this episode, which you can find at www.freepod.org/scripts.

1. 1475 Deming (corner of LaCresta and Deming)
2. Corner of LaCresta and Burchard
3. On Burchard three houses south of the hospital
4. Two houses on Stewart north of American
5. Smith Street between Harlem and Whistler
6. 1234 W Lincoln
7. 1267 W Lincoln
8. West Empire Street by Saxby Avenue
9. Two houses on Locust Avenue near the high school
10. 1849 W Revere St
11. Park Boulevard and just around the corner on Pearl City Road
12. 1015 S. Stewart
13. 2nd house north of American on west side of Harlem
14. About a block south of the north Walgreens on the west side of West St./Rt. 26
15. Corner of Greenfield and Cheyenne just off West Galena (on the north side of Galena)

If your family is looking for less fright and more focus on fun, take in the Freeport Public Library's preschool story time featuring **Not-So-Spooky Halloween Stories**. This event is designed especially for young children, including pre-schoolers, and takes place Wednesday, October 29th from 10:30 to 11:00 a.m. at the Library. Happy Halloween stories will be read and there will also be songs to sing and trick-or-treat through the library, and attendees are encouraged to wear their costumes.



To cap off the spooky season, later in the day next Wednesday, October 29th, Classic Cinema's Lindo Theatre presents a special showing of the 2025 re-release of director Tim Burton's 1993 holiday classic

The Nightmare Before Christmas at 7:00 p.m. On Friday night, the actual date of Halloween, ***neighborhood trick-or-treating*** runs from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.

The week ahead...

As we look at the week ahead, we're looking forward to watching VOICES' Second Annual Domestic Violence Awareness Pickleball Tournament at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday at the Krape Park Pickleball Courts, and later on at 1:00 p.m. there's the Aiming for a Change One Dart at a Time Dart Tournament benefiting VOICES at Jerod's Bar & Grill in Shannon.

If you're hungry tomorrow or Saturday, the Cub Foods Brat Stand this weekend will be run by the United Way of Northwest Illinois. They'll be there both Friday and Saturday from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. to serve up brats, burgers, hot dogs, and ribeye sandwiches.

Don't forget the Farmers Markets Saturday morning both in downtown Freeport and near Higher Grounds on the south edge of the City, as well as in Lena. It's the last Saturday for the outdoor event in downtown Freeport, but we'll have more soon on how the event will continue over the winter months.

On behalf of the Greater Freeport Partnership and downtown, we wanted to also echo a heartfelt thank you to Craig Deininger and Andy for all their hard work on the beautiful flowers throughout the downtown over the summer. Not only did they make our streets beautiful, but they also volunteered their own time to help with weeding and cleaning up downtown. Thank you, gentlemen!

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.

We also wanted to remind everyone that we're really enjoying the great in-depth interviews you can hear every week on FREEPOD, and are sure you will too if you're not already! This week's interview featured FREEPOD host Alan Wenzel visiting with Freeport Police Chief Chris Shenberger, who has just retired after 27 years of service. The interview, which aired first on Tuesday, is available online and can be listened to anytime.

Next Tuesday, FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Tim Connors chats with well-known Freeport native and attorney Tim Mahoney about Freeport over the years and what makes it special. This conversation will post at noon on Tuesday, October 28th 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.

In closing...

In closing, as we've mentioned before, we need your help! When you're listening on your favorite podcast platform, please "like" or "follow" us – this helps us to move up in the rankings of podcasts and enables us to better promote ourselves throughout the region. On Facebook, also please click on "like" as the algorithms there also depend on user input to help us increase our presence.

And speaking of increasing our presence remember that FREEPOD is now on YouTube! The program is currently audio only but having it on the YouTube platform now gives you another super-easy way to listen. You can find both English and Spanish versions – just head to YouTube.com and search for FREEPOD or click the link in the print version at <https://www.youtube.com/@FREEPOD61032/podcasts>. Please tell all your friends and family members about our YouTube channel too – everything you do can help get local news out to our community!

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, WNIJ 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 – or any time after that on our website or your favorite podcast platform – and thank you for listening!

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

LINKS TO OTHER COMMUNITY EVENTS NEWSLETTERS BELOW



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