



Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Becky Connors...

And I'm Tim Connors...

In this week's episode, the Freeport Fire Department promotes new leadership...

An Iowa legislator proposes making Jo Daviess county a part of the Hawkeye state...

And Arctic Ale and Art Walk provides a fun and delicious opportunity for the Freeport community.

This is Freepod for February 12th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

### FREEPORT FIRE DEPARTMENT PROMOTES NEW LEADERSHIP

The Freeport Fire Department announced a slew of promotions this month. Starting from the top of the department, Tom Korte was sworn in as the new Chief of the Freeport Fire Department on February 2nd.

Korte was named the city's "Firefighter of the Year" in 2018, just one year after being promoted to Lieutenant. In 2020, he continued his rise up the ranks being named District Chief. And he has been serving as the interim Chief since the retirement of his predecessor, Scott Miller, last month.

In addition to Korte's promotion, the department also elevated Hillary Broshous to Deputy Chief, Matt Kile to District Chief, and Mark McCullough and Chris Brennan to Lieutenant.



### CITY GIVES AWARDS TO EMPLOYEES FOR LIFE SAVING ACTS

Last week, we reported on a residential fire that destroyed two homes and damaged a third on West Clark Street. And while the damage was severe, outstanding work by emergency services professionals helped keep that damage from growing exponentially.

At the city council meeting on February 2nd, the city honored Police Officer Timothy Krieger and emergency services dispatch operator Cierra Matthews for their part in helping those directly impacted by the blaze.



Krieger was honored for aiding a resident of one of the buildings that jumped from the second story to escape the flames. While Matthews was credited for being a professional and beneficial first contact for those in need.

## CITY OF FREEPORT TO ADDRESS FIRE HYDRANT UPDATES

City of Freeport officials have announced a plan to replace targeted fire hydrants throughout the city in the coming year.

In all, the city has identified 36 particular hydrants to be replaced. Every summer, city officials inspect fire hydrants across the city and report back any issues they find.

In light of recent events, the city has become aware that some hydrants were testing properly during the summer, but faced challenges in quick use due to the extreme cold our region recently experienced.

In response, the city is moving quickly to remove and replace any hydrants that have similar builds, and therefore a likelihood for similar problems, to the hydrants in question.



## OSHA PRESENTS AWARD TO CITY OF FREEPORT

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, better known as OSHA, presented an award to the Public Work Department at the city council's February 2nd meeting.

The award, named the Safety & Health Achievement Recognition Program, or SHARP, was given to Freeport's Public Works due to their operation of exemplary safety and health programs for employees.

OSHA gives this recognition to organizations that complete an on-site consultation program, and it gives those entities an exemption from OSHA inspections for up to two years.

## PRETZEL CITY AREA TRANSIT SEEKING INPUT ON FIXED ROUTES

Pretzel City Area Transit is rolling out a fixed-route option this summer, and they want your feedback on where that route should go.

Area residents can take a brief, anonymous survey to help the city determine where stops should be placed, along with the frequency of those stops.

To fill out the survey, visit [bit.ly/3YXVPsB](https://bit.ly/3YXVPsB)



## GFP GIVES OUT ANNUAL AWARDS

The Greater Freeport Partnership held their annual dinner and awards ceremony last week, honoring 10 individuals and organizations for their work in building community and prosperity in the greater Freeport area.

Larry Feiner was given the LeBaron Lifetime Achievement award for his continued work in multiple community focused organizations and events in the Pretzel City. Feiner told the audience in atten-

dance that he was proud to say he served along side all of them.

Other notable award winners include Rootz & Branchez for Business of the Year, Studio Elan for Start-up of the Year, Ted Odendahl as Volunteer of the Year, and the Senior Resource Center named the Not-for-Profit of the Year.

### **BLACK HISTORY MONTH AT FHS**

In 1976, President Gerald Ford first recognized February as Black History Month in the United States. The purpose was to help us all remember the “too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans.” And building a sense of community both within the Black community and with the Black community in the United States at large has become an integral part of that recognition.

I spoke with one of the advisors of the Black Student Union at Freeport High School recently about how that club is helping to not only recognize the contribution of Black Americans, but how they are building community for Freeport students.



(INTERVIEW)



### **PAT NORMAN NAMED JANE ADDAMS LEGACY AWARD WINNER**

Loyal listeners of Freepod will certainly recognize the name Pat Norman. As both a presenter and a Board member, Pat has provided an invaluable service to both Freepod and our community. But now, Pat’s gifts are being recognized beyond what she provides to local news.

The Foundation for Northwest Illinois has recently announced that Pat is the 2026 recipient of their Jane Addams Legacy Award. Citing Pat’s decades of work fostering civic health through direct action and administrative excellence, the Foundation is honoring Pat’s service as a reminder of the legacy of Cedarville’s own Jane Addams and her qualities of participation, connection, and agency.

Along with being a lifelong educator and retired school administrator, Pat also serves as the President of the local NAACP, and serves on the Boards for Voices of Stephenson County and the Boys & Girls Club of Freeport & Stephenson County.

Pat will be honored at the Foundation’s Gatsby Gala, taking place March 21 at the Freeport Club.

From all of us here at Freepod, a heartfelt congratulations to our friend Pat Norman. We cannot think of a better candidate for this prestigious award.

**SAM SCHAIBLE NAMED NEW PRESIDENT OF FOUNDATION FOR NORTHWEST ILLINOIS**

In other Foundation for Northwest Illinois news, Sam Schaible has been named the new President of the Board of Directors for that organization. Schaible, a lifelong resident of the area, is the first person in the organization’s history to be a resident of Jo Daviess county.

The Foundation is excited for this new leadership, citing Schaible’s appointment as a reflection of the organization’s mission to be a truly regional partner.



**UNITED WAY OPENS FUNDING APPLICATIONS FOR 2026-2027 CYCLE**

The United Way of Northwest Illinois has opened up their grant applications for the 2026-2027 cycle. Organizations in Stephenson, Jo Daviess, or Carroll county who have 501(c)3 non-profit status, and serve households that live at or below a designated financial threshold are eligible for these grants.

The United Way of Northwest Illinois is specifically focusing on four key areas that they believe make the greatest impact: Healthy Community, Youth Opportunity, Financial Security, and Community Resiliency.

For the full text of the Request for Proposals, and to apply, go to [uwni.org](http://uwni.org).

**IOWA CONSIDERS PUSH FOR JO DAVIESS COUNTY TO JOIN THE HAWKEYE STATE**

An Iowa lawmaker has introduced a bill in that state’s legislature that would serve as the first step to absorbing Jo Daviess county and other border counties in to the Hawkeye state.

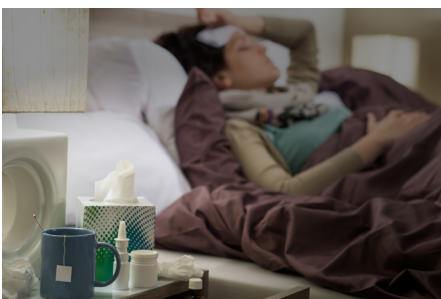


State Representative Taylor Collins says that he has had Illinois residents reach out to him to advocate for such a move as they want to live in a “lower tax state.”

The Iowa House is unlikely to take up the bill in the current session, but the bill can be reintroduced at a later date.

Last year, the state of Indiana passed a similar bill, but without accompanying legislative approval from the Illinois government, no actual change occurred.

**ILLINOIS SEES WORST FLU SEASON IN YEARS**



The Illinois Department of Public Health is alerting the community to the rising risk posed this flu season. According to the IDPH, at least 100 people have died from the flu this season, highlighting a considerable increase in both the rate and severity, and the highest rate since 2009-2010.

Experts are even more concerned when considering that, typically, the highest

rates of transmission aren't usually seen until mid-February.

Dr. Taylor Heald-Sargent, an Infectious Diseases professor at Northwestern University, says that a key reason we're seeing such a spike this season is due to growing skepticism around vaccinations. In response, Dr. Heald-Sargent encourages individuals to not turn to the internet for information, but rather to speak directly to their own trusted physician.

### **LOCAL LAWMAKER PROPOSES BILL TO COMBAT MEDICAL MISINFORMATION**

To help combat medical misinformation, one local lawmaker has introduced a bill to the Illinois House. Dave Vella, representative for Illinois's 68th district, has recently filed the Combating Health Misinformation Act.

The bill would establish a Health Misinformation Response Unit within the Illinois Department of Public Health. This Response Unit would be tasked with monitoring and directly countering misleading health information, including offering grants for public health literacy, requiring health literacy be added to school curriculums, and employing trusted messengers on matters of public health.

Vella says he brought the bill forward due to what he sees as a growing crisis of health misinformation permeating social media. But another local lawmaker, Representative John Cabello, says the bill is entirely unnecessary; countering that "People are pretty smart and they have the internet, so they can look at (information) themselves."



### **SPEAKER SERIES: THE HEALTH IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

This coming Wednesday, the Environmental Study Group's lecture series on the impacts of climate change continues at the Freeport Public Library.

Starting at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 18th, Dr. Jack Herrmann will present on the health impacts of climate change. Dr. Herrmann is a Professor Emeritus from the Center for One Health at the University of Illinois, and has served on the Illinois State Board of Health for the past 12 years.

The presentation is free and open to the public, with time for questions being allotted for after the presentation. Light refreshments will be provided.

### **SRC HOSTS FREE NASA PRESENTATION**

The Senior Resource Center is hosting an opportunity for residents to understand space exploration in an exciting way.

On Monday, February 17th, the SRC will host science communicator and NASA Ambassador Sarah Treadwell for a presentation titled "Back to the Moon: Artemis II and What It Means for All of Us."

Treadwell will speak to the audience about the upcoming Artemis II mission, which will see a crewed journey navigate around the moon for the first time in 50 years. The mission is part of NASA's bigger plans to ultimately



send human missions to Mars.

The presentation starts at 11 a.m. on the 17th, and while the event is free, seating is limited. To reserve your spot, please call the SRC directly at (815) 235-9777.



### ARCTIC ALE AND ART WALK READIES FOR ANOTHER YEAR

This year's Arctic Ale and Art Walk is drawing near and the Greater Freeport Partnership wants everyone to feel welcome exploring the downtown event.

The Walk starts at noon and goes to 4 p.m. on Saturday, February 28th, and will feature 17 businesses with local artists and samples of locally produced beers in their shops. Tasting cups will be available at the Greater Freeport Partnership office, where you will also get your event wristband and a list of participating locations. Tasting cups cost \$10 a piece.

But even if beer is not your thing, you can still participate. Along with local breweries, several locations will also have non-alcoholic drink options available. And, of course, the art showings are there for Freeporters of all ages.

Main Street Manager Katie Gentz told us that it is volunteers' passion that really drives the event.

(AUDIO CLIP)

To register for the event, go to <https://greaterfreeportpartnershipchamber.growthzoneapp.com/ap/Events/Register/wZFNAGQleCxw>.

### 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. Pretzel City Barbershop has been operating in downtown Freeport for more than two years now, and Tim Connors spoke with owner/operator James Rivas to find out more about how the shop is keeping alive the legacy of both barbering and the cultural impact of downtown barbershops.

This coming Tuesday, Alan Wenzel presents a conversation with Beth Johnson from the Regional Office of Education. Beth spoke to us about the Family Enrichment Program that the ROE offers and how it can benefit families throughout Stephenson and Jo Daviess county. That interview will be available starting at noon on Tuesday, February 17th. You can find it, and all of our other interviews, on our website, [www.freepod.org](http://www.freepod.org), or wherever you get your podcasts from.

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.

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](http://www.freepod.org).

This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.



# **FREEPOD**

**The news you've been missing.**