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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 news specific to our community.

We're getting more listeners every week, and much of that is thanks to you. Please share about us on your social media and thank you for your enthusiasm – now here's news you've been missing.

EXTRA: Podcast Deep Dive

Local elections are coming up on Tuesday, March 19th and to help listeners make informed decisions, FREEPOD developed a quick way to catch up on where candidates stand on issues that impact our community. [At the end of this podcast](#), after our weekly stories, we're presenting short interviews with candidates in contested races only.

Our format is 5 Questions in 5 Minutes, and each of the candidates is asked the same questions so that you can compare their responses apples-to-apples in just five minutes. Here are the questions:

1. What skills would you bring to this office that would make you an effective Stephenson County Board member?
2. If elected, what is the most important issue you would want the Board to address?
3. Why is this issue important to County residents?
4. What steps would you recommend the County Board take to resolve that issue?
5. What is one thing that voters may not know about you that you'd like them to know?

This week you'll hear from Ronnie Bush, one of the two Democratic party candidates for Stephenson County Board District B, which includes Precincts 1, 2, and 3. His opposing candidate, Alana Paige, has announced that she has personally withdrawn from the race for District B but as she was running when we began our interviews, we are including the interview with Mr. Bush. His five-minute interview is included at the end of this podcast. You can also listen to the end of last week's podcast where we heard from Robin Rosenstiel Wanona Wellspring Ceisel who are competing to represent District F.

FREEPOD also contacted the offices of the two Republican candidates in the race to represent the 17th Congressional District in the U.S. Congress, Scott Crowl and Joe McGraw, multiple times. They did not respond but here are their websites with their positions on various topics:

Scott Crowl <https://crowlforcongress.com/>

Joe McGraw <https://judgejoeforcongress.com/about-joe>

Now let's get started on the news you've been missing.

Town Hall to answer questions about tax increase

The City will host a town hall tomorrow, Friday March 15th, to answer questions about the City's 5-year street program, funding options for a sustainable road program, and a potential 1% sales tax increase. Other questions from attendees will also be addressed.

The event begins at 4:00 pm tomorrow afternoon, Friday March 15th, at the Freeport Public Library and is planned to conclude at 5:30. FREEPOD will report on these issues in future episodes.

HCC athletes excel academically

HCC student athletes are winners in the classroom! The 117 student athletes involved in the 2023 fall semester had a 3.12 cumulative grade-point average. Highest among the sports? Those volleyball players, with a 3.51 GPA, followed closely by the golfers with a 3.42.

All student-athletes must meet an academic standard that includes a minimum of 12 credit hours with a 2.0 GPA each semester to be involved in their respective program. Congratulations to these hardworking individuals for successfully balancing their studies and their sports.

VOICES receives funding from 100 Women Who Care of Stephenson County

On March 5th 100 Women Who Care of Stephenson County presented a check for \$11,000 to VOICES of Stephenson County.

This group meets quarterly and chooses a recipient after hearing from several groups nominated by members to make presentations about why their organizations should receive the group's quarterly \$10,000 monetary award.

100 Women Who Care each contribute \$100 quarterly to support local non-profit organizations in Stephenson County but as you can tell from the \$11,000 award to VOICES, the group actually collects more than \$10,000 some quarters. Anyone can donate to the organizations that are nominated to present proposals.

If your non-profit would like to be considered for a monetary award or if you'd like to join the 100 Women Who Care team, contact them at 100WWCStephensonCounty@gmail.com. This email is also included in the print script for this week's podcast on our website.

The Educational Opportunity Center at Highland

Adults, high school students, and veterans facing obstacles in achieving a college education can find a helping hand at Highland Community College's Educational Opportunity Center. The center is part of the TRIO program funded by the U.S. Department of Education and sponsored by the college.

Anthony Sago (SAY-go) of Highland Student Services is head of the program through Project Succeed, which has been operating on a five-year \$344,538 grant that is paid in annual installments. Since the late 1980s, Project Succeed has played a major role in the lives of under-represented, first-generation secondary education, and low-income students.

Each participant receives ongoing individual attention and support by meeting with a coordinator to discuss goals and develop a strategy for success. The program also makes a significant contribution to the college's retention and completion rate.

PlayCore Award to Blackhawk Elementary School

In other school news, It's time to increase outside fun and fitness at Freeport School District's elementary schools!

All the elementary schools in District 145 recently built new playgrounds to advance play and recreation through healthy movement and meaningful student experiences. Blackhawk School received special recognition for its efforts. The school was honored with a PlayCore Award for design and implementation of its new outdoor space, which was also named a National Demonstration Site by the company.

PlayCore creates recreation environments and outdoor community spaces. The award recognizes the school district's use of evidence-based best practices in design, and its thoughtful support of health and wellness among students. Recognition signage is on display at Blackhawk Elementary School.

Bet all the kids are looking forward to Spring to get out and enjoy their new PlayCore equipment!

Downtown Freeport news

In downtown Freeport news, on April 1st, This Is It Eatery is moving to the location of the former Bourbon's On Main in the Hampton Inn building on the corner of Main St. and Galena.

There is a bigger kitchen there and much better parking for restaurant-goers, and the owners of This Is It are looking forward to serving their regular customers in this new setting and welcoming many new friends as well!

Ryan Zuravel, Imagineer

And last, another story about a Freeport graduate being a great representative of our community!

2011 Freeport Aquin grad Ryan Zuravel is making a name for himself at the most magical place on earth as an "Imagineer" for the Walt Disney Company in Orlando, Florida. He uses his computer engineering degree from the University of Illinois to design and build new theme park attractions.

Ryan's latest project is the Journey of Water at EPCOT. Inspired by the movie *Moana*, visitors can "enjoy magical encounters with water and discover its playful personality, just as Moana did on her heroic voyage. Participants interact with water in new ways as they learn about the global water cycle and

discover how they can help protect this important natural resource.” Ryan worked on the computer vision system that helps the water interact with guests.

Says Ryan, "The most rewarding thing about working for Walt Disney Imagineering is watching as guests experience your attraction with laughter and joy. The long nights, weird hours, and hard work are absolutely worth it."

Ryan can't tell us much about his current project, which is under wraps, but he is working on the future of audio-animatronics.

Ryan's parents, Stan and Meg Zuravel ([zoo-RAH-vell](#)), and grandparents, Ray and Mary Scholbe ([SHOAL-bee](#)), reside in Freeport and are very proud of Ryan's role for Disney. Congrats, Ryan!



Stay tuned for one of our 5 Questions in 5 Minutes candidate interviews for Stephenson County Board representation!

Until next week...

FREEPOD is proud to be part of a growing movement to stop and reverse the decline of local news sources in Illinois, and we invite you to tune in for news about Freeport businesses, City plans and progress, area rewards and recognition, local impacts related to state and national news, and more.

We also have a great announcement this week: ***FREEPOD is now an official 501c3 organization!*** As an IRS-recognized non-profit, contributions to FREEPOD are now tax deductible. We're proud of this status and hope you will consider a contribution to help us meet our minimal administrative expenses. Just go to www.freepod.org for more info.

As we've said before, FREEPOD couldn't come to you without the help of many local supporters. As always, we're especially appreciative to the Mass Communications Department at Highland Community College for all of their help producing this podcast, and to our many liaisons and reporters for the time they volunteer to bring the news to you. Thank you, Highland and Team FREEPOD!

If you have story suggestions or would like to donate to support FREEPOD (now tax-deductible), check out our website at www.freepod.org.

Check back next week for more news you've been missing

and thank you for listening!