



**28 March  
2024**

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.

A reminder: we know you may not be able to jot down details when we refer to a URL or a phone number in a story, such as where to find more information or register for a program. No worries: we always include that information in the script for the episode that you can find online at our website, [www.FREEPOD.org](http://www.FREEPOD.org). We also occasionally include photos for specific stories.

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.

### **Congressman Eric Sorensen secures funding for clean water infrastructure in Freeport**

Congressman Eric Sorensen was able to secure over 2.8 million dollars in Federal funding for Northern Illinois in March to fund police, repair broken bridges, and help ensure access to clean drinking water by working across the aisle in the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. Almost 960 thousand of those dollars will be used to replace wells in Freeport that were shut down due to contamination. This investment will help bring Freeport's water supply back to original safe levels.

Freeport Mayor Jodi Miller said, "The City of Freeport is very grateful for Congressman Sorensen's efforts in these 2024 appropriations for local communities in his district. This funding will definitely stretch our dollars in our 14 million-dollar project to continue to provide safe and clean drinking water to all of our residents."

Mayor Miller added that the City looks forward to continuing to work closely with our Congressman on more infrastructure projects.

Sorensen secured financial support for these projects as part of the Community Project Funding process that allows members of Congress to secure investments for critical initiatives in their communities. Said Sorensen, "Northern Illinois is a special place, and it is my job to make sure my neighbors can live and grow a family in communities that are sustainable for future generations. One of the ways I can make sure that happens is by bringing tax dollars back home to support middle-class families." He is the Representative for Illinois' 17<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, which includes Freeport and much of Stephenson County as well as the Quad Cities and other points south.



*From left: Freeport City Manager Rob Boyer, Freeport Mayor Jodi Miller, Congressman Eric Sorensen, Fehr-Graham Project Manager Darin Stykel*

### **FHN and Rosecrance Behavioral Health and FHN announce behavioral health partnership**

The behavioral health services offered at FHN Family Counseling Center, 421 West Exchange Street, have been transferred to Rosecrance Behavioral Health on South Galena Ave in Freeport. This partnership streamlines the delivery of behavioral health services within the community while continuing to provide comprehensive care for the unique needs of each client.

FHN President and CEO Mark Gridley said, "Community members of northwest Illinois will benefit from expanded services across the region through this transition of behavioral health services to Rosecrance in Freeport."

FHN and Rosecrance will work together to ensure a smooth and seamless transfer of services that will not disrupt existing FHN patients' care. The transition will also include case management and peer support services.

Behavioral health services transferred to Rosecrance include psychiatry; individual, group, and family psychotherapy; prevention services; and school-based programs. FHN Crisis services will transfer to Rosecrance's existing crisis care model, which includes mobile crisis response and 988 call response. Services will also include treatment for substance use disorders.

Rosecrance Behavioral Health CEO Dave Gomel said he looks forward to expanding services to meet the area's needs and ensuring that clients receive uninterrupted and exceptional care throughout the process.

### **Greater Freeport Partnership wins tourism marketing award**

The Greater Freeport Partnership's "Be A Trailblazer" marketing campaign emerged victorious at the Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel and Tourism, held at the Peoria Civic Center on March 19, by winning an Illinois Excellence in Tourism Award.

The campaign showcased Freeport and Stephenson County's numerous parks, trails, and recreation opportunities. Based on visitor data, over 100,000 people booked overnight stays from May to October 2023 in Freeport or Stephenson County.

Nicole Haas, Brand Director of the Greater Freeport Partnership, said, “We are thrilled to receive such an honor for Freeport and Stephenson county. The attractions, beautiful spaces, and incredible people of this area provide great opportunities for tourism promotion, and we are excited for the continued growth in this important sector of our local economy.”

The Greater Freeport Partnership is a collaboration of economic development, business and tourism efforts united to promote and grow Stephenson County.



*Greater Freeport Partnership Brand Director Nicole Haas and Randy McDaniels of McDaniels Marketing accept the award for Best Tourism Marketing Campaign from Illinois Office of Tourism Director Daniel Thomas at the Illinois Excellence in Tourism Awards on March 19, 2024 at the Peoria Civic Center.*

### **Tree removals spark interest**

After more than 3,000 ash trees were cut down recently in Freeport due to the ash borer pest, more trees are on the chopping block because some city officials and homeowners think they are potential hazards. Others say these trees are healthy and the decision is driven by the insurance industry and utility companies, among other reasons. A group of citizens is stumping to protect the trees and explains that there are other options to fix the issues without cutting down the trees. Stay tuned to FREEPOD for more news as this situation progresses.

### **K-9 for Freeport PD**



The Freeport Police Department has a new officer starting this week and he's not even 2 years old yet. DJ is the new K-9 addition to the police department and he and his partner, Officer Richard McElmeel (shown together at left) hit the streets early this week and are on duty ready to go. DJ is a German Shepard named after former Freeport Police Pastor Dennis Jarrard who died in a motorcycle accident.

The K-9 program had stopped in Freeport but was brought back thanks to citizen and business donations through the Foundation for Northwest Illinois. Those donations paid for DJ and all training and equipment. Welcome to Freeport, DJ!

## **New bike path funding**

More than \$2 million was awarded for bike path projects across Illinois, and the Freeport Park District is one of those beneficiaries. The Park District received \$200,000 for a new bike path at Krape Park.

Freeport Park District's Executive Director, Ron Schneider said that he's glad that the State realizes the importance of bicycle infrastructure. Said Schneider, "Bike paths like this are important because they're great for outdoor recreation, health and wellness. But they also connect neighborhoods, parks, schools, retail centers, and provide safe routes for cyclists."

## **Biking season is here!**

Although the snow last week might not have felt like Spring, Spring IS here and if that last story got you thinking about biking, we have ideas! The Freeport area has become more bike friendly in the past few years, starting with the Jane Addams Trail leading up to the Wisconsin border and connecting to the Badger State Trail.

We also have biking in our park district, including the paved trail system in Krape Park that will be enhanced with the award to the Park District, and the single tracking trails at Oakdale. Oakdale is better suited for mountain biking, with fairly easy trails and a few more difficult sections.

You can also take to back roads in Stephenson County. Biking up Henderson Road to Orangeville and coming back on the Jane Addams Trail is a nice ride as well as going south out of Krape Park on Park Road, where you can bike to Florence and points south as far as Shannon.

For some really great single-track mountain biking, head to Atwood Park in New Milford, just over a half-hour away south of Rockford. This park is absolutely top notch when it comes to single tracking, which is a type of mountain biking where the trail is approximately the width of the bike or in other words, narrow! Check out the local Facebook group called "Chain Link Cyclists" for other local biking suggestions.

## **Two Spring-time nature programs**

As Spring gets underway, our listeners can enjoy two nature programs in early April.

On Tuesday, April 9<sup>th</sup>, the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society is hosting their 41<sup>st</sup> annual banquet featuring the presentation "Illinois' Wild and Wonderful Early Bloomers" by Master Gardener Cindy Crosby.

Crosby is an author, compiler, or contributor to more than 20 books. She will share stories about our earliest spring wildflowers, their folklore, and their uses throughout history by Native Americans and early settlers, as well as many beautiful photographs. A teacher in the Master Gardener Program, Crosby coordinates volunteers on the fourth oldest restored prairie in North America.

The event takes place at Highland Community College Student Conference Center in Freeport and includes the option of a full turkey or vegetable lasagna dinner with special desserts for only \$32 for adults. Kids age 12 and under can eat free. Reservations for the meal must be received by tomorrow, March 29<sup>th</sup> so if you'd like a great meal with your presentation, reserve your seat quickly!

If you would prefer to just attend the program, admission is \$5 for adults and free for kids and students. If you just want to attend the program without the meal the cost is \$5 for adults (free for kids and students).

Dinner is at 6:00 p.m. and the speaker will present at 7:30 pm. You can register online at the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society website or by calling 815-835-5109.

The second nature program is “Cicadas 2024 — A Once in a Lifetime Experience” where you can learn more about the upcoming May and June appearances of Broods XIII (13) and XIX (19), the life cycle of cicadas, what to expect in our area, and why this is a once in a lifetime occurrence for most people.

This will be presented at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 10<sup>th</sup> at Nicholas Conservatory in Rockford by Russ Higgins, retired Illinois Extension Educator and insect enthusiast. He will also address what plants in your yard might be tasty temptations for them and how your home landscape can be protected.

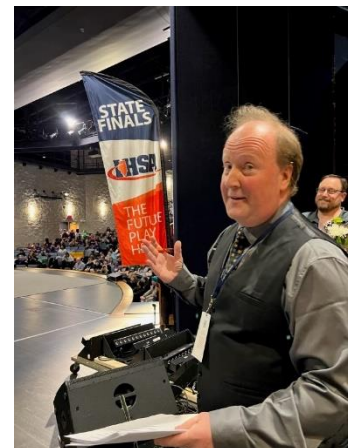
This free presentation is offered through a partnership between Illinois Extension and Nicholas Conservatory. The Conservatory is located at 1354 N. 2nd Street in Rockford. Registration is requested by calling Extension at 815-986-4357 or registering online at [//go.illinois.edu/cicadas2024](https://go.illinois.edu/cicadas2024).

### **Freeport High School team wins film award**

A Freeport High School team was one of the top winners in a field of 44 teams from across Illinois that entered a 5-minute short film in the Illinois High School Association’s Short Film Festival competition. The contest was part of the Drama and Group Interpretation State Finals.

After being selected by an initial panel of three judges, the top 12 films were judged by a new panel that determined the final winners on Saturday, with Freeport receiving 4<sup>th</sup> place honors statewide. Freeport High School’s short film was produced by junior Will Scudder and directed by Elijah Michael, with Scudder and Angela Gautam acting in the film.

The Freeport team’s winning film was titled “Guacamole” and is the story of a young man failing to put together many pieces of an important project until he realizes that every ingredient is important in its own way, like the ingredients of guacamole. Freeport High School educator Tim Connors was the Short Film Advisor for the project. Watch the film: <https://youtu.be/L1oTzUXAYSA?si=850zm5cIRY-QiSyZ>



*(Top) From left, Elijah Michael, Angela Gautam, and Will Scudder of Freeport High School educator Tim Connors*

## **More entertainment!**

For all the classic movie lovers out there, you'll enjoy "The Learning Tree", which is the next film in Lindo Theatre's Select Pix classic film series hosted by Ed Finch and Alan Wenzel at the Lindo Theatre. This 1969 film is directed by Gordon Parks, the first black to direct a feature film for a Hollywood studio, and is based on his best-selling book of the same title. It follows the life of an African American youth growing up in a rural Kansas farm community. "The Learning Tree" screens next Wednesday, April 3rd at 1:00 and 7:00 p.m. 2024 is the 14th year for the popular film series.

And it's Showtime! This musical production put on by the Freeport High School Varsity choir and showtime band members, who rehearse all year and go on a tour during spring break performing at schools and other venues. The money raised through the Freeport performances helps pay for the tour. Upon the students' return from tour, they perform for the community in the Jeanette Lloyd theater at the Freeport School District Middle School. This is the 44<sup>th</sup> year for the program!

Performances are 7:00 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, April 4th, 5th, and 6th, and 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, April 7<sup>th</sup>. Reservations are required and tickets can be purchased by calling 815-232-0428 or online at [www.fsd145.org/tickets](http://www.fsd145.org/tickets).

## **Sign up for FREEPOD on a podcast platform**

After next week's episode on April 4<sup>th</sup> we will no longer be sending email announcements from the FREEPOD team to remind you about new episodes. However, reminders **will** be sent by the numerous podcast platforms on which FREEPOD appears. You can also listen to all the archived episodes of FREEPOD on these platforms.

FREEPOD does not have capability on our website to archive all of our previous episodes and we also do not have an automated way to send out alerts for new episodes. As we are staffed entirely by volunteers, we've decided that the podcast platforms can handle these two tasks for us, as they do for all their other podcasts.

If you are unsure how to sign up for FREEPOD through a podcast platform, please visit our website for easy instructions. It only takes two or three clicks, and we've got screen captures to show you exactly how to do it on your smart phone or computer.

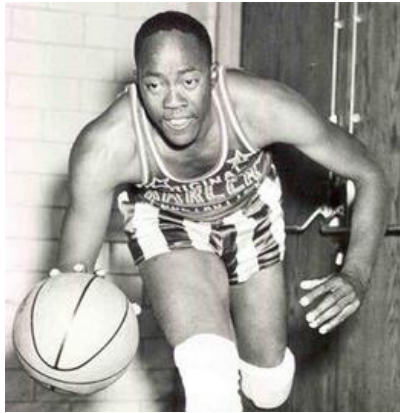
The most recent few episodes will still always be available on our website, and there will be a print version of those episodes too if you prefer to read your news. We urge you, though, to sign up through a podcast platform to ensure you always receive reminders for the most recent postings.

## **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.

Before we go, last week when we signed off we ended with the hope that everyone is enjoying the NCAA March Madness games so this week we thought we'd give a shout-out to some former Freeport High School basketball players who went on to great things.

In 1951, the Pretzel basketball team won a state championship. One member of that team was McKinley “Deacon” Davis. Davis went on to play college basketball at the University of Iowa, where he was on the team that reached the 1955 Final Four, and later played with the Harlem Globe Trotters for several years. Carl Cain was also a member of the 1951 State Championship Pretzel basketball team and also played for the Hawkeyes in college. After college, he went on to play on the 1956 American Olympic Basketball Team. We hope the players on the teams you’re cheering do as well as these former Pretzel Players!



*McKinley “Deacon” Davis*



*Carl Cain*

As you know, FREEPOD couldn’t come to you without the help of many local supporters. We’re especially appreciative to the Mass Communications Department at Highland Community College for 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](http://www.freepod.org).

***Check back next week for more news you’ve been missing!***