



**7 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.

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 the two Democratic Party candidates for Stephenson County District F, which includes Waddams Grove, McConnell, Winslow, and much of Lena. The candidates are

- Robin Rosenstiel
- Wanona Wellspring Ceisel

Both of their five-minute interviews are included at the end of this podcast. We are asking all of the candidates in contested races to be interviewed with this format and will let you know if any of them decline to participate. So, look forward to some more election information next week!

Again, welcome to FREEPOD and let's get started on the news you've been missing.

Freeport Community Public School Fund gives \$75,000 of supplies to District 145 educators

The Freeport Community Public School fund granted nearly \$75,000.00 worth of educational supplies and tools to Freeport School District 145 educators in the last quarter of 2023. Recipients submitted requests, and gifts were granted through the annual allocations process.

A not-for-profit organization, the Freeport Community Public School Fund was created to help supplement learning for all district students in all grade levels. Items typically purchased include Chromebooks, software, musical instruments, globes and maps, science equipment, graphing calculators, and more.

Monetary donations from generous supporters make these gifts possible. To date, over \$1.3 million in necessary supplies and equipment has been given to the educators in District 145. To donate or for more information, go to the Freeport Community Public School Fund website.

Freeport Police Department Officers recognized

Freeport Police Officers Brandae Hilby and Conor Greene received distinguished honors at a recent City Council meeting.

Hilby was selected as the City Employee of the Year and also previously was named Officer of the Year for the Police Department.

Greene received the Lifesaving Award for his actions at an accident scene in early February where he helped remove a driver from a burning vehicle after a collision at West Avenue and Fairgrounds Road near Wal-Mart.

Thank you, Officers Hilby and Greene!



Officer Hilby, above center



Officer Greene, at left

Highlights from Highland board meeting

At a recent meeting of the Highland Community College board, President Chris Kuberski highlighted enrollment increases for three consecutive semesters. Vice President of Finance Jill Janssen reported a 2% increase in community college budgets by Gov. Pritzker while also cautioning that it will impact individual colleges in different ways.

HCC Foundation Director Dan Dick announced that the Foundation is funding a new access road at the HCC farm and discussed potential funding for an Athletic/Events Center, which FREEPOD will report on in more detail soon. Fundraising efforts so far have yielded \$25,000 for HCC, with potential for a larger donation for Fine Arts.

Board approvals included a unanimous acceptance of a five-acre gift, bids for a new parking lot, building renovations, lighting replacements, and electronic tuition payment software.

Highland also recently announced that a \$150,000 grant had been received to help dual-credit students take advantage of the Career Pathways program coordinated with North Illinois University. Kuberski suggested that a Career Pathways coach may be funded with some of the monies from the grant. It is hoped that dual-credit offerings can be further expanded into western parts of Highland's district.

New VP sought at Highland

In other Highland news, the Board voted in January to accept the resignation of Sam Adgasi, Vice President of Academics. President Kuberski reported on the formation of a search committee to find a replacement for Adgasi. A search firm will narrow the field to the final candidates, including assembling "personality profiles" on each candidate to better assess their working style. Interviewing is expected to start in March with the selected candidate beginning duties at the beginning of the fiscal year on July 1.

The Board thanked Jim Phillips for taking on interim Academic Vice-Presidential duties in addition to his normal duties as Humanities, Social Science and Fine Arts dean and co-director of the Leadership Program. President Kuberski also praised Phillips for his efforts in completing Highland's annual Illinois Community College Board report.

Aquin and Orangeville girls' basketball co-op

After news broke of the second failed vote to deny a co-op between Aquin and Orangeville girls' basketball, a firestorm began burning up social media. Anger, frustration, and questions all poured out from the Aquin fans.

The vote taken within the conference was 13-7 but 15 yes votes were needed to approve the merger. It was the second vote on the proposed co-op after an earlier one in January also failed. The significance of the vote is that Aquin girls who want to play basketball next year now will have to transfer to another school to continue their high school athletic careers.

There are surely many reasons for the no votes by the conference schools, but none have been shared publicly. Also unknown is what action Aquin, parents of students, or others may take in response to this. The one thing that is certain is there will be no Aquin girls playing basketball next season, and sports have always been important at Aquin.

FREEPOD will have updates on the impact of this story in the coming weeks.

Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs visits United Way

Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs visited Freeport last Friday on a fact-finding mission at United Way of Northwest Illinois.

Frerichs' office oversees the Illinois Charitable Trust, which awarded a \$15,000 grant to United Way in 2022. He said that the goal of his visit was to get ideas on how to improve the program in different areas of the state. It is a pleasure to get out and see people who are making the work happen," said Frerichs.

The local United Way grant ended in June 2023 and fund care packages to 272 seniors in Stephenson, Jo Daviess and Carroll counties. The packages were filled with healthy groceries complete with recipes, as well as personal hygiene and household products. Frerichs said he was impressed by the way United Way used volunteers extensively through the project, especially to deliver the care packages.

United Way Executive Director Connie Kraft was pleased to share her insights with Frerichs and is eager to apply for an Illinois Charitable Trust grant again. Said Kraft, "We were able to offer fresh foods to seniors, which was huge as many told us that was rare for them. We already have bigger and better plans for our next grant."

Non-profit organizations in Illinois with budgets of less than \$1 million can apply for Illinois Charitable Trust grants to support food, housing, or job skill development. The grant application period is currently open. Interested non-profit organizations can apply through the Illinois State Treasurer's website.



Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs, third from left; United Way Executive Director Connie Kraft, fourth from left, and other members of the United Way of Northwest Illinois team.

Foundation of NWIL announces scholarship and funding

The Foundation for Northwest Illinois is partnering with two local families to benefit Black and underserved youth in Freeport.

First, the Rachel and Roy Sellers Sr. Scholarship Fund has been established by their children. It will provide an annual scholarship to an African American Freeport High School graduate who is the first

generation in their family to go on to attend any vocational, two-year, or four-year post-secondary educational program.

In addition, Ian's Fund, for the Boys and Girls Club of Freeport and Stephenson County, has been established by Marilee and Ted Odendahl. This fund, named after their son, will support the work of the Boys and Girls Club in perpetuity.

If you would like to contribute to either of these funds, please visit the Foundation of Northwest Illinois' website at fornwil.org. Thank you to the Sellers and Odendahls for their support of Freeport youth!

Upcoming school events

There are two school events this week that sound like fun. The Annual World Arts Festival is today, Thursday March 7th, from 4 to 7 p.m. at the Jeanette Lloyd Theater at the high school, featuring over 1,000 elementary, middle school, and high school students offering their performing talents in celebrating our cultural diversity. Performances and art displays take place in the Jeannette Lloyd Theater, the FHS gymnasiums and cafeteria, from 4:00 - 9:00 PM. You don't want to miss this great FSD tradition !

Coming up this weekend, you can enjoy some great big band music with the MOONLIGHT SERENADE event at the Masonic Temple this Saturday night, March 9th, from 7:00 to 9:00 pm.

Next week, the Freeport High School theatre department will present its annual Art to Art series of one-act plays on March 14, 15, and 16 at 7 pm in Room 228 at the high school. This unique initiative is totally student-run and one of only a few similar programs in the state. Seniors Rachel Sdao, Janyah Palmer, and Nate Redmore each select a one-act play, coordinate auditions, cast their shows, direct them, and handle all production aspects, including lighting, props, and sound.

Proceeds benefit the school's Thespian Troupe 464 – one of the oldest in the country – and raise scholarship funds for speech and theatre students.

“Art to Art gives students a chance to see what it is like to be in charge of an entire production, from conception to completion,” says Tim Connors, FHS Theatre Director. “The Studio Theater at the high school offers an intimate theater setting, and Art to Art really gives the students an opportunity to soar.”

Tickets are \$6, available ahead of time at the high school business office or at the door.

Freeport's celebrity stylist

And speaking of theatric performances and Freeport High School, when you're watching the Oscars next Monday, March 11th or other award shows this season, keep an eye out for the handiwork of Freeport native Kristen Shaw. Kristen helps create a special look for many of Hollywood's most sought-after celebrities. She does hair styling and men's grooming for the likes of Ben Affleck, Seth Rogan, Jonathan Bailey of Bridgerton fame, Javier Bardem, Pierce Brosnan, and Bob Odenkirk, to name just a few of her most famous clients. Hilary Swank and Tilda Swinton are among her favorite female subjects.

In addition to readying the stars for public appearances, her work can be seen on the pages of many magazines, including GQ and Rolling Stone. She is represented by The Wall Group.

Kristen graduated from Freeport High School in 2005 and currently lives in Los Angeles. She is the daughter of Al Shaw and the late Jan Shaw, who lived in Freeport for nearly 30 years. Kristen credits former FHS English teacher Ed Finch and speech and theatre instructor Tim Connors for encouraging her to stay curious and pursue a creative field.

Spencer Tracy Academy Awards

As long as we're on the subject of the Academy Awards, we have a little Oscar Trivia for you. There are two actors in the entire history of the Academy Awards who won back-to-back Oscars for Best Actor in a Leading Role. One was Spencer Tracy, who won in 1938 for *Captain Courageous* and 1939 for *Boys Town*. Who is the other actor? No fair Googling.

We'll have the answer for you next week, and we're also planning something special about the story of Spencer Tracy's close relationship with Freeport.

Looking ahead...

First, a quick thank you to our listeners and others who contributed to the Freeport Public Library's Food for Fines program in February. While slower than last year, they were still able to donate over 150 pounds of food to the FACC Food Pantry. Thank you, Library fans!

Next up, be sure to root for the Cougars! Both the men and women won their first games in the Region 4 Division 1 Men's and Women's Basketball Tournament being held at Highland this week. Neither have yet played their next game at the time we're recording this but if they prevail in those games too, they'll both be in the championship games on Saturday. GO COUGARS!

And it might sound like theatre week in Freeport because we have one more theatre event coming up! The play *LEAVING IOWA* will be presented at the Ferguson Fine Arts Theatre at Highland beginning tonight, March 7th, and running through Saturday night, March 9th.

An outlandish take on the classic family road trip, *Leaving Iowa* is the story of a writer who returns home to find a final resting place for his father's ashes. When he discovers his childhood home is now a grocery store, he travels across Iowa searching for a proper resting place for his father. *LEAVING IOWA* starts at 7:30 p.m. all three evenings and tickets are on sale now at \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors, and \$5 for students.

To end on a really positive note: Spring is indeed on the way! According to the local chapter of the Audubon Society, Canada geese are already starting to return as bird migration begins in earnest.

Some of the earliest migrants are waterfowl. Watch for White-fronted Geese and Tundra Swans, which were observed north of Freeport in the Wetlands Preserve on the west side of Highway 26 in early March last year. Both of these species are just stopping by on their way to their nesting grounds in northern Canada.

To identify them, know that White-fronted Geese have a similar posture to Canada Geese. However, they are somewhat smaller and have an obvious different color pattern on their heads. Both swans and geese are often seen in a back-end up head-down-in-the water-position as they find their food.

If you go to look for them a pair of binoculars will be helpful, and please be careful turning off and on to busy Highway 26.



Stay tuned to listen to two of our 5 Questions in 5 Minutes candidate interviews in a contested race for Stephenson County Board!

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.

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, check out our website at www.freepod.org.

Check back next week for more news you've been missing and thank you for listening!