



**23 January
2025**

Welcome to FREEROD, 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.freerod.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. Thanks for your support!

Freeport Mayoral election update

Erin Hoskinson has withdrawn her petition to change Freeport's City Manager and part-time mayor form of government back to a full-time mayor and no City Manager. The move also officially puts an end to putting a referendum on the April ballot asking the same question.

A court hearing on the legality of the petition was canceled when Hoskinson withdrew it. Freeport residents voted for the change to the City Manager/Part-time Mayor form of government in May 2017.

Candidate forum next week

With the April 1st Municipal Election coming up fast, the League of Women Voters of Freeport is providing a chance to get to know the candidates who if elected will be making decisions directly impacting our community at a candidate forum next Tuesday, January 28th at 6:00 p.m. at the Freeport Public Library.

Candidates include those running for Freeport Mayor, Freeport City Council, and the Boards of Freeport School District #145, the Freeport Park District, the Freeport Public Library, Highland Community College, and Freeport Township.

The candidates will offer brief introductions and there will then be time to visit with attendees one-on-one while enjoying refreshments.

The event is also supported by the Rockford Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and the Freeport Branch of the NAACP.

New squad cars

The Freeport City Council has approved the purchase of three new 2025 Ford Explorer Police Interceptor squad cars for the Freeport Police Department to replace vehicles with considerable mileage. The successful bid for the vehicles was submitted by Stiver's Ford in Waukee, Iowa at \$48,190 for each vehicle, minus a \$19,000.00 to trade-in of four older squad cars and an additional negotiated discount of \$500 per vehicle for a total expenditure of \$124,070.

Stiver's Ford also submitted a bid to upfit the three squad cars, bringing the final cost to \$148,192. The funding for this project is included in the 2025 capital budget for the police department.

What's up with the price of eggs?

There has been a lot in the news about the price of eggs, and you may have observed higher prices yourself. Why? Well, one important reason is the bird flu virus.

The bird flu virus, also known as H5N1, continues to circulate among poultry flocks and some dairy farms, affecting both humans and animals and definitely impacting the price of eggs. According to the USDA, the virus has claimed over 20 million laying hens during the fourth quarter of 2023 alone and over 100 million since the epidemic began in 2022.

Emily Metz, president and CEO of the American Egg Board, said in a statement to the news organization Axios that "the volume of eggs sold at retail has been up year-over-year for 20 consecutive months" and that the winter holidays are the highest demand season of the year. "These two forces combined — tight supply and high demand — are directly causing the spike in wholesale prices we've seen recently," Metz said. In addition, the trickle-down effect on food products that contain eggs is also significant and one of many reasons why the price of groceries over the past four years has risen.

As noted, the virus is also causing human illness. To date, there have been 66 confirmed human cases in the U.S. but no evidence of human-to-human transmission. Of those cases, 40 cases have been among dairy workers, 23 among poultry workers, and three with unknown exposure or possibly wildlife exposure.

The affected individuals have had very mild symptoms and have recovered without any complications. According to the CDC, the current public health risk is low. However, people who have job-related or recreational exposure to infected birds or animals, including cows, are at greater risk of contracting bird flu virus.

The bird flu virus so far shows no signs of the mutation that would allow H5N1 to lead to a pandemic, but that could change. When flu viruses go back and forth between species, especially between poultry, pigs, and people, they can more readily mutate to increase infectivity.

Although veterinarians are on the front line in this outbreak, physicians and other health care providers should always ask patients about animal exposures when treating individuals with respiratory symptoms, and people working with animals who could be carrying the virus should always be sure to practice safety precautions. More information can be found at www.cdc.gov/bird-flu (verbalize the hyphen, <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html>)

More about the new owner of the former Stephenson County Visitors Center

As we reported last week, after being on the market for more than a year the former Freeport/Stephenson County Visitors Center located on U.S. 20 just east of Freeport has a new owner.

BCG Group Incorporated bought the building and will be operating a nationwide, online classic car dealership called AutoSmart there. Brian Caldwell, owner of AutoSmart, says that the business is unique in that it is consignment-based, allowing them to sell a variety of products without needing a big inventory. AutoSmart will sell campers, trailers, used cars, and motorcycles as well as providing detailing services and selling a range of detailing products.

Caldwell is proud of the company's past community service and plans to continue that role in Freeport. He has been a Rotarian and involved in many drives for food and other goods as well as in efforts serving homeless veterans. As the business grows, he would like to start a Coffee and Cars discussion group that would offer free speakers and discussions of interest to motor vehicle enthusiasts. This has been popular at other locations. He expects the new business to be open in April.

The visitors center opened in 2005. The Greater Freeport Partnership eventually began operating the building but closed the facility in April 2023.

One Book One Freeport book release party

As mentioned last week, the book release party for One Book One Freeport is this Saturday, January 25th from 12:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. in the meeting room at the Freeport Public Library.

Pick up your free book to read as part of this community-wide program, learn more about upcoming activities, and enjoy live music from the Early Jazz Society, tasty snacks, a community craft activity and a puzzle for everyone's participation.

For more, if you haven't already listened to this week's in-depth interview featuring FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Becky Connors interviewing Dianne Ludwig about the program, it's available online with lots more great details about this every-other-year program nationally celebrated program.

Basketball for little folks

The Family YMCA of Northwest Illinois is open registration for their Dribble, Pass, and Play basketball program for kids aged pre-kindergarten through 2nd grade. This non-competitive program emphasizes teamwork, skill-building, and having a great time on the court. The program begins on February 22nd and runs through April 5th with practices during the week and games on Saturday mornings.

Early bird registration is offered at a \$10 discounted fee of \$40 compared to the registration fee of \$50 for the remainder of the sign-up timeframe February 3rd through 7th. Spaces fill up quickly, so secure your child's spot today.

Volunteer coaches are needed too, so contact the Y at their front desk, through their website, or by calling 815-235-9622. That's 815-235-9622.

FACC home item collection

The Freeport Area Church Cooperative known by the acronym FACC is working to find housing for the homeless and are looking for almost all types of household items needed to set up homes. They will pick up furniture items. For more information, call 815-233-0435. That's 815-233-0435.

Wintering raptors

On Tuesday, February 4th Vic Berardi, founder of the all-volunteer Illinois Beach State Park Hawk Watch and well-known raptor photographer, will present *Wintering Raptors of Illinois and Wisconsin* with emphasis on raptor descriptions and possible locations to find these birds in the winter months. Berardi's photos have been used by conservation organizations and in raptor field guides.

The program will be held from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. at St. John United Church of Christ in Freeport. The event is supported by the Northwest Illinois Bird and Nature Alliance.

Park District winterization

For those who haven't noticed, here's a reminder of Freeport Park District Winterization program which is in effect through the end of March. At Krape Park, roads to upper Flagstaff Hill are closed to vehicles in precaution of icy conditions and the sled hill has been fenced in anticipation of more snow in the weeks ahead. In the meantime, one pickleball court net remains up in Krape Park and one tennis court net remains up in Read Park and elsewhere, soccer and basketball nets have been taken down.

The parks are just as beautiful in the winter as during warmer months, so it's always a great time for a hike through these wonderful community spaces!

Candyland Ball

The Park District's popular Candyland Ball is coming up on Valentine's Day! Registration is open for Dads or another significant adult and daughters 10 years or younger to dress up and dance the night away in royal fashion at the Masonic Event Center!

The event is scheduled for Friday, February 14th at 5:00 p.m. and entrance for the event is \$16 for Freeport residents and \$17 for non-residents. Registration is now open and must be completed by Friday, February 7th either online by Googling the Mom and Me Masquerade in Freeport Illinois or by calling 815-235-6114. That's 815-235-6114. (<https://bit.ly/candylandballmomandmemasquerade>)

Hilldale Deli moving to Lanark

The owners of Hilldale Deli have announced they are moving the business out of downtown Freeport to Lanark but no end date has been set yet. They cited high permit costs in Stephenson County as one reason for the move.

Preparations are ongoing for the Lanark location, but Hilldale will stay open in Freeport at the corner of Van Buren Avenue and Stephenson Street until the new place is ready. FREEPOD will report further as the transition progresses.

New games store to open

As Hilldale leaves a new store arrives and it will be all fun and games at a new store opening soon just north of Freeport. Twisted Games and Collectables is set to open February 7th at 1030 N Riverside Drive near the driver's license office.

Featured items for sale will be board games, Magic, Pokémon, and Dungeons and Dragons. Customers also can play all the games on tables in a large gaming area and bring their own game or rent one. Check out Twisted's Facebook page for their open hours every day of the week.

The week ahead...

As we look ahead, this Saturday is another day for the Stephenson County Winter Farmers Market at the Stephenson County Farm Bureau from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Also, here's a reminder for the local ag community about the Agronomy Summit at Highland Community College next Wednesday, January 29th from 10:00 a.m. to 2:35 p.m. at the college's Conference Center. This year's conference will feature research updates from University of Illinois faculty specialists, highlighting best management practices in the areas of soil fertility, corn and soybean management, and weed control. Registration is \$25 and is required to attend. To register or for more information about the Northwest Illinois Agronomy Summit, visit go.illinois.edu/jsw or call U of I Extension at 815-235-4125. That's 815-235-4125.

We'll have more next week on an open house at Tri-County Christian School planned for Tuesday, February 4th and we're already looking forward to the Arctic Ale and Art Walk in downtown Freeport on Saturday, February 22nd.

As a reminder, 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 subscribe to their free weekly newsletter there too, and we have a link to a QR code in the print version of this newscast if you'd like to sign up that way.

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In closing...

In closing, if you haven't already done so, be sure to listen to this week's in-depth interview featuring FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Becky Connors interviewing Dianne Ludwig of the Freeport Library about the Library's biennial One Book One Freeport program. Then tune in to next week's Tuesday in-depth interview featuring FREEPOD host Alan Wenzel interviewing Highland Community College President Chris Kuberski as they talk about plans for the college in 2025. Their conversation will post at noon on Tuesday, January 28th.

With that, time's up for this week. Tune in again next Thursday at noon for more about what's happening in Freeport, and be sure to subscribe to us on your favorite podcast platform to receive alerts

as each new pod airs. You can also always click through to our pods through our Facebook page or the website of our partner, WNIJ National Public Radio in DeKalb, at www.northernpublicradio.org.

As always, FREEPOD couldn't come to you without the Mass Communication Department at Highland Community College and our community liaisons and reporters. We're also grateful to WNIJ for partnering with us in reaching even more listeners, including Spanish-speaking community members. Thank you, Team FREEPOD! For more info, including how to make a tax-deductible contribution to support our work, visit our website at www.freepod.org.

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