



FREEPOD

The news you've been missing.

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

And I'm Becky Connors...

In this week's episode, the city of Freeport honors a beloved community mama...

The Stephenson County Sheriff's Department makes a major drug seizure...

And Cruise Night is getting ready to fire on all cylinders.

This is Freepod for July 30th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

FREEPORT NAMES STREET AFTER BELOVED CITY MOTHER

A longtime Freeport resident known for her compassion and service has been honored with an honorary street designation. The Freeport City Council unanimously approved honorary "Mama T Allen" signs along the 600 and 700 blocks of South Liberty Avenue, between East Pleasant and East Shawnee Streets.

The application, submitted July 9th, included signatures from more than 51% of adjacent property owners, meeting the City's requirements. Verdone "Mama T" Allen moved to Freeport in 1977 and spent 25 years working at Goodyear and Kelly-Springfield Tire before retiring in 2003. But many remember her less for her career than for the countless lives she touched. For decades, Mama T opened her home and heart to neighbors in need, providing meals, clothing, shelter, and encouragement, especially for local children. She also served faithfully at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church as a choir director, choir president, and children's choir leader.



City staff says the designation aligns with Freeport's goal of recognizing residents who have made lasting contributions to the community. The honorary signs will be paid for by the petitioners, with no cost to taxpayers.

PRETZEL CITY AREA TRANSIT ANNOUNCES FIXED ROUTE PILOT PROGRAM



A new chapter for public transportation begins in Freeport next week. Pretzel City Area Transit and the City of Freeport will launch a Fixed Route Pilot Program on Monday, August 3rd, introducing scheduled bus routes with designated stops and arrival times throughout the city.

The pilot is designed to make it easier for residents to travel to work, school, medical appointments, shopping, and other community destinations while helping officials evaluate whether a permanent fixed-route system would benefit Freeport and Stephenson County. During the pilot, PCAT's on-demand service will continue unchanged, operating Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. until midnight and Saturdays from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Riders are encouraged to try the new routes and provide feedback that will help shape the future of public transportation in the community. Route maps, schedules, and additional information are available here: <https://www.pretzelcitytransit.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/pretzel-city-transit-Large-Print-Fixed-Route-Map-7-21-26.pdf>

RE-FRESH FREEPORT RETURNS

If you've been meaning to clean out the garage or basement, Saturday is your chance. Re-Fresh Freeport returns on Saturday, August 1st, after a two-month break, giving residents another opportunity to dispose of unwanted household items and help beautify the community. The volunteer-led clean-up initiative encourages people to clear out clutter while reducing illegal dumping and improving neighborhood appearance.



Organizers say the program has become a popular community effort to keep Freeport looking its best. Residents are encouraged to review the list of accepted and prohibited items before participating. Additional details, including drop-off information and guidelines, are available through the Re-Fresh Freeport Facebook page. Community volunteers are also welcome to lend a hand during the event.



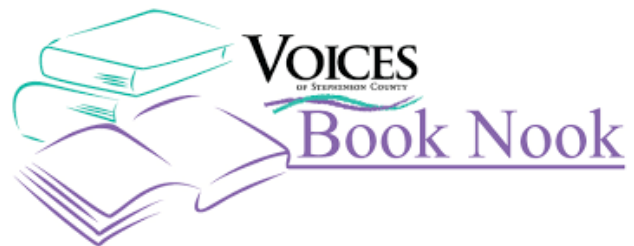
NATIONAL NIGHT OUT 2026 ANNOUNCED

The Freeport Police Department is inviting the community to celebrate National Night Out 2026 on Tuesday, August 4th, from 5 until 8 p.m. at the Read Park Pavilion, located at 1200 Park Lane Drive. The annual event brings together police officers, firefighters, first responders, and local families for an evening focused on strengthening neighborhood relationships and promoting public safety.

Visitors can enjoy free food, games, family activities, giveaways, and the opportunity to meet the men and women who serve the community. National Night Out is held each year in communities across the country to encourage crime prevention and build stronger partnerships between residents and law enforcement. The Freeport Park District is once again hosting this year's event, and everyone is invited to attend.

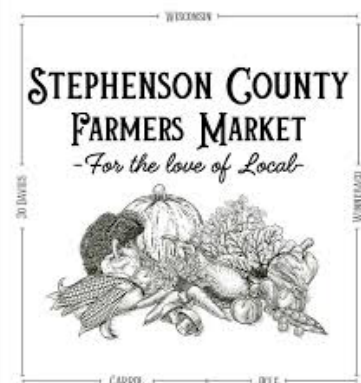
BOOK NOOK HALF PRICE SALE

Book lovers will want to mark their calendars for one of Freeport's biggest annual bargains. The Book Nook Half-Price Sale returns beginning Thursday, August 6th, and continues through Saturday, August 15th. The Book Nook opens at 10 a.m. Monday through Saturday and closes at 4 p.m., except for Thursdays when it stays open until 7 p.m.



Shoppers will find thousands of gently used books, along with DVDs, CDs, puzzles, and other items, all at half price. Proceeds from the sale benefit VOICES of Stephenson County.

The Book Nook is located inside the Lincoln Mall at 1265 W. Galena Ave.



SIGN UP FOR A DIGITAL FARMERS' MARKET PASSPORT

A new mobile app is encouraging residents to explore farmers markets across northwest Illinois while supporting local agriculture and small businesses. The Stephenson County Farmers Market has launched its new Cross Pollination Adventure through the free Goosechase app, thanks to a grant from Compeer Financial.

Participants can compete individually or as teams by checking in at 13 farmers markets stretching from Monroe, Wisconsin, to Sterling, and from Pecatonica to Galena, along with four local farm stands. Each market visit unlocks bonus challenges that spotlight nearby locally owned businesses. Organizers say it's a fun way to discover fresh local food, meet area farmers and producers, and experience communities throughout the region. Registration is free, and more information is available here: stephensoncountymarket.com

TIPS ON HELPING THE BIRDS BEAT THE HEAT

With another stretch of hot summer weather affecting northern Illinois, bird experts are reminding residents that a few simple steps can help local wildlife beat the heat. The National Audubon Society says providing fresh water and shade are the two most important ways to help birds during periods of extreme heat.



A clean birdbath gives birds a place to drink and cool off, while native trees and shrubs provide critical shelter from the sun. Experts also recommend planting native vegetation to provide food for birds and the insects they rely on, especially during nesting season. If you use feeders, avoid putting out suet in hot weather, as it can spoil quickly. Audubon says even small changes in your own backyard can make a meaningful difference for local bird populations.



SCSD SEIZES NEARLY 29 POUNDS OF MARIJUANA IN TRAFFIC STOP

A Freeport man is facing serious drug charges after the Stephenson County Sheriff's Office says deputies seized nearly 29 pounds of cannabis during a traffic stop in rural Stephenson County. Authorities say 36-year-old Azibriel J. Parker was arrested after deputies stopped a vehicle around 2:30 a.m. on July 19th near Illinois Route 75 East and Church Road for a suspected traffic violation.

Investigators say a search of the vehicle uncovered approximately 29 pounds of cannabis, along with about \$1,800 in cash. Parker has been charged with unlawful possession of cannabis with intent to deliver more than 5,000 grams, a Class X felony under Illinois law, and was booked into the Stephenson County Jail pending a detention hearing.

Officials remind the public that although adult-use cannabis is legal in Illinois, trafficking and possessing large quantities without authorization remains a felony offense. As with all criminal cases, the charges are allegations, and Parker is presumed innocent unless proven guilty in court.

WIFR/WREX ANNOUNCE MERGER DETAILS

A major change is coming to television news in northern Illinois. Beginning this September, WIFR and WREX will unite under a new brand: Rockford News First. The rebrand follows Gray Media's acquisition of WREX and is designed to create a single regional news operation serving the Stateline.



Under the new brand, viewers will continue receiving local news, First Alert Weather forecasts, and regional sports coverage. WIFR.com and WREX.com will redirect to RockfordNewsFirst.com, while the stations' streaming channels, mobile news app, weather app, and social media accounts will all transition to the new Rockford News First identity over the coming weeks. Station officials say the goal is to remain the region's most trusted source for local news, weather, and sports.

With this change, the four Rockford television stations are now owned by just two corporate entities.



LANARK NATIVE NAMED CEO OF ILLINOIS PRESS ASSOCIATION

Jeff Rogers has been named the new president and chief executive officer of the Illinois Press Association.

Rogers officially assumed the role on July 21st while continuing to serve as executive director of the Illinois Press Foundation. He succeeds Steve Jameson and will focus on member services, programming, and strengthening the association as Illinois' journalism landscape continues to evolve. Rogers founded Capitol News Illinois and has led the Illinois Press Foundation since 2018, overseeing significant growth in both organizations. Before that, he spent three decades as a newspaper editor and reporter in Sterling, Dixon, Galesburg, Freeport, and Monroe, Wisconsin.

A Lanark native and Bradley University graduate, Rogers says he's looking forward to expanding support and resources for newspapers and journalists across Illinois.

LIFELONG LEARNING REGISTRATION BEGINS AT HCC

Registration opens next week for Highland Community College's Fall 2026 Lifelong Learning program, offering adults across northwest Illinois the chance to learn something new—just for the joy of it. Beginning Monday, August 3rd, at 8 a.m., community members can sign up for 59 classes, including 33 brand-new offerings, with sessions held in 10 communities across seven counties.

This semester's lineup includes everything from cookie decorating, watercolor painting, birding, pickleball, and home repair to Civil War history, sushi making, and even a Christmas bakery bus tour of downtown Chicago. No grades, tests, or prerequisites are required. Registration is available online at highland.edu/lifelong or by calling 815-599-3403.



Organizers encourage early registration, as many classes have limited enrollment.



SPECIAL DEER HUNT APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN

Applications are now being accepted for Illinois' special deer hunt permits, including opportunities at several public hunting areas in northwest Illinois.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources says the third lottery application period for firearm and muzzleloader deer permits is open now through August 21st, giving both residents and nonresidents another chance to secure county-specific permits before the fall hunting seasons. Special Hunt Area permits for designated public sites are available only through the lottery process and will not be sold over the counter.

Hunters can apply, check permit availability, and find site-specific information through this link <https://dnr.illinois.gov/hunting/deerhunting.html?>

BYRON OPEN TO NEW NUCLEAR FACILITY

Illinois is taking another step toward expanding nuclear energy, and Byron is once again in the spotlight.

Ogle County has formally expressed interest in hosting a new nuclear facility adjacent to the existing Byron Clean Energy Center, citing the area's established infrastructure, skilled workforce, and decades of community support for nuclear power. County officials say the proposed site could accommodate a Small Modular Reactor or another advanced nuclear technology, with land negotiations potentially beginning within the next six to 18 months.



The proposal comes after Governor J.B. Pritzker lifted Illinois' decades-old ban on building new large-scale nuclear plants as the state looks to meet growing electricity demand and prevent future energy shortages. Officials emphasize that no project has been approved, but Byron is among nine Illinois communities now under consideration as the state evaluates potential sites for the next generation of nuclear energy.



MUSIC ON CHICAGO

One of Freeport's biggest summer concerts is coming up on Friday, August 7th, as Music on Chicago welcomes The Pork Tornadoes to the FAM Arts Plaza at 15 West Douglas Street. Gates open at 5 p.m., with DJ Cup kicking off the evening, plus food trucks and beverages available on site. Admission is just five dollars, and children ages five and under get in free.

Known as one of the Midwest's top party bands, The Pork Tornadoes have performed more than 800 shows for over 1.5 million fans, covering everything from Taylor Swift and Morgan Wallen to Phil Collins and The Killers. Concertgoers are encouraged to bring a lawn chair and enjoy another night of live music hosted by the Greater Freeport Partnership in downtown Freeport.

CRUISE NIGHT RETURNS

Classic cars, custom trucks, motorcycles, and plenty of nostalgia will roll back into downtown Freeport next month as Cruise Night returns for its 48th year on Saturday, August 15th, from 5 until 8 p.m. Hosted by the Greater Freeport Partnership, the annual event transforms downtown into a showcase of hundreds of hot rods, muscle cars, antiques, street rods, and vintage vehicles.



In addition to the vehicles, visitors can enjoy live music from 3D Sound, local food vendors, event merchandise, and family-friendly activities while supporting downtown businesses. Whether you're bringing a classic ride or simply coming to admire the cars, organizers say Cruise Night remains one of Freeport's signature summer traditions. Registration and event information are available at <https://freeportcruisenight.com/>



CARROLL COUNTY FAIR

One of northwest Illinois' favorite summer traditions is just around the corner.

The Carroll County Fair returns to Schell Park in Milledgeville from Tuesday, August 4th, through Saturday, August 8th. Fair activities begin each morning around 8 a.m. and continue into the evening with livestock shows, 4-H exhibits, carnival rides, grandstand entertainment, live music, and plenty of fair food. Opening day includes the annual parade at 7 p.m., while families can enjoy children's activities, horse and livestock shows, a horse pull, motorcycle racing, and the popular livestock auction throughout the week.

Organizers say this year's fair will once again celebrate the county's rich agricultural heritage while showcasing the talents of local youth.

A complete daily schedule, admission information, and event details are available here: <https://carrollcounty-fair.info/>

IN CLOSING...

Before signing off this week, a programming note for our listeners. Did you know that you can read any of our scripts any time on our website? Along with "broadcasting" our podcast each week, we also publish a print version of each weekly news episode on our website, www.freepod.org. The print version allows you to move at your own pace to absorb the news you've been missing.

And because of the nature of a podcast, you can also get the news when you want it. While we release these newscasts every Thursday at noon, they are available anytime. So, while we appreciate it if you think of Freepod as "appointment listening," the reality is that you can download our episodes and play them whenever you have time.

And it's not just our newscasts either. Our interviews are available to listen to anytime as well, including this past week's interview. I spoke to Craig Deininger about the story behind his acquisition and re-opening of Deininger Floral, as well as his plans for the future of this downtown institution.

We'd 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 Media Studies depart-

ment at Highland Community College for producing this podcast.

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This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.



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