



# **FREEPOD**

**The news you've been missing.**

Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Alan Wenzel...

And I'm Lynn Feaver...

This is not just the first episode of the new year, but it's also the first episode of a new period in FREEPOD's history.

Before we begin with this week's stories, we'd like to inform all of you about some important changes happening behind the scenes here at FREEPOD.

For the last two years, we have enjoyed bringing you the news you've been missing. And we hope you've enjoyed having this resource for our community.

But as we look ahead, we recognize that FREEPOD can...and should...be more.

In order for FREEPOD aims to expand both our editorial focus and our coverage area in the coming months and years, we are instituting a change in our editorial leadership.

That new editorial leadership comes from Jim Yeager. Jim is currently an instructor and the Director of Mass Communication at Highland Community College. Although Highland has been producing FREEPOD episodes with Jim's guidance, this new role for Jim is outside his normal College responsibilities and does not implicitly or explicitly indicate a formal partnership with the college.

Jim is taking on this FREEPOD editorial role because of his journalistic interests and because of his educational and professional experience in journalism, including working for the Rockford Register Star, Northern Star Radio, WTVO, and WREX.

All of us here at FREEPOD are excited for the opportunities that lie ahead. And while we are hopeful that a new direction will bring in new listeners, we vow to never lose sight of the philosophy we started with that built such a loyal and dedicated community of informed listeners.

So, with that...here is the news that you've been missing...

## **FREEPORT POLICE DEPARTMENT HIRES A NEW CHIEF OF POLICE**

The Freeport Police Department has announced the hiring of Dr. Jacquelyn B. Frausto as the new police chief for the city.

Dr. Frausto comes to Freeport after serving more than 25 years in the Chicago Police Department. During her tenure there, Frausto served in leadership roles including Field Services, Analytical Assessment Operations, and Research & Development. Along with her work experience with the police department, the city of Freeport also noted Frausto's experience as an adjunct faculty member, teaching criminal justice, business, and information technology.



Frausto comes to the position after the previous chief of police, Chris Shenberger, announced his retirement back in October of 2025, and she will be sworn in at the Freeport City Council meeting on January 5th.



### NEW LAWS FOR ILLINOIS

Starting today, hundreds of new laws take effect in the state of Illinois. Some noteworthy laws include:

Allowing pharmacists to dispense contraceptives

Requiring insurance companies to cover brand-name drugs when generics are unavailable due to shortages

Prohibiting the discriminatory use of AI in employment

Allowing 7th and 8th grade students to enroll in high school level courses for credit

Guaranteeing public education access to all students regardless of immigration status

Strengthening requirements for firearms to be placed in secure, locked containers when they are located in areas where children could access them

Requiring gun owners to report a firearm stolen within 48 hours, instead of the previous 72

Making cocktails to go permanent in the state

And HB 4439, which officially names the soybean as the state bean of Illinois.

### DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE SUES ILLINOIS GOVERNOR

In more statewide news, Governor JB Pritzker is being sued by the Department of Justice over new laws in Illinois preventing civil arrests at and around courthouses and also requiring hospitals, day care centers, and public universities to have procedures for handling civil immigration operations.

The Justice Department is arguing that these laws violate the US Constitution and “threaten the safety of federal officers.”

As part of these news laws, any individual who was unlawfully arrested while attempting to attend a court proceeding could be eligible for up to \$10,000 in damages. The lawsuit comes in the wake of “Operation Midway Blitz,” an action undertaken by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the Chicagoland area, that resulted in more than 4,000 arrests.



### POLICE INCREASE PATROLS FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

The Illinois Department of Transportation is stepping up efforts for drivers to “Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over.” And to do so, the Illinois State Police and more than 200 law enforcement agencies are stepping up roadway safety efforts.

These efforts will see an increase in patrols of rural areas, neighbor-



Illinois Department  
of Transportation



hood streets, and major highways throughout the holiday season.

The nationwide campaign encourages drivers to plan ahead before outings, including choosing a designated driver, using ride share services, and making sure that no one who is impaired gets behind the wheel. State leaders say taking these precautions can help prevent crashes and ensure the holidays remain safe for everyone traveling.

### **SENIOR RESOURCE CENTER POSTS RECORD BREAKING YEAR**

The Senior Resource Center announces a record-breaking year for its Medicare Open Enrollment Program. In 2025, staff and volunteers helped local older adults save more than \$1 million on prescription drug plans.



Each fall, the Senior Resource Center offers free, unbiased Medicare counseling to help older adults review their coverage and select plans that best meet their healthcare and financial needs. Through one-on-one assistance, SRC's trained staff and volunteers compare prescription drug plans, identify cost-saving options, and ensure participants understand their choices.

The Medicare Open Enrollment Program serves hundreds of older adults each year and is offered at no cost. SRC counselors are trained to provide objective information, ensuring participants receive assistance that is in their best interest—not tied to insurance companies or sales commissions.

SRC Executive Director Amanda Faivre says, "The level of savings we achieved this year is a testament to the importance of this service. Older adults deserve clear, compassionate support when navigating complex healthcare decisions, and our team is committed to delivering that help year after year."

The Senior Resource Center extends its sincere appreciation to the volunteers whose service and expertise made this record-breaking year possible.



### **MCCOMBIE NAMED MOST EFFECTIVE REPUBLICAN LAWMAKER IN ILLINOIS HOUSE**

A local lawmaker has earned a prestigious title. House Minority Leader and Representative for the 89th district Tony McCombie was recently named the Most Effective Republican Lawmaker in the Illinois House.

The designation comes from the Center for Effective Lawmaking, a nonpartisan think tank comprised of members from Vanderbilt University and the University of Virginia.

According to the report, Minority Leader McCombie introduced 426 bills in the 103rd General Assembly, with 398 receiving action in committee, 387 receiving action beyond committee, 6 passing the House, and 5 ultimately becoming law.

McCombie, a Savanna native, represents a district covering Carroll, Jo Daviess, DeKalb, Ogle, Stephenson, and Winnebago counties.

## **FORMER FHS ATHLETE OF THE YEAR PASSES AWAY UNEXPECTEDLY**

Tragic news came for the Freeport Pretzels wrestling community. Freeport alumnus and standout wrestler Jacob Redington passed away unexpectedly on the campus of Cornell College in Iowa.

Redington, a 2023 graduate of Freeport High School, was studying to become an Elementary School teacher, a passion that was fueled while still in high school, as Redington served as a student teacher at Blackhawk Elementary his junior and senior year. His love for teaching, coaching, and mentoring was furthered during the last two summers working as a mentor for the Upward Bound program at Highland Community College.



Above all else, Redington loved wrestling. And he was good at it. Named 2023 Athlete of the Year at FHS, a 2 time IESA State Qualifier, 3 time IHSA State Qualifier, and 2019 Illinois Freestyle State Champion.

No cause of death has been released at this time.

A memorial fund in Redington's name can be found here: <https://www.walkermortuary.com/obituary/jacob-redington>.



## **BASE CAMP LAUNCHES FOR 2026**

The Business Academy for Small Businesses & Entrepreneurs, or BASE Camp, has opened its registration for 2026. The camp, offered by the Greater Freeport Partnership, is designed to equip aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners with the essential knowledge and skills needed to succeed

in today's competitive market.

Now in its third year, BASE Camp consists of six evening classes spread over 12 weeks and starts on January 20th. Registration for the full slate of classes is \$200, but participants are allowed to take just some of the classes for \$50 each. Scholarships are available for those who demonstrate a need.

Participants who complete the full series of classes are eligible to participate in the Business Pitch Competition, with \$3,500 up for grabs for participants to help grow their business.

Classes will be held at the Greater Freeport Partnership office, located at 110 W. Main Street in Freeport.

For more information, or to register, you can visit this link: <https://greaterfreeport.com/business/basecamp/>

## **GET FIT IN 2026 WITH FHN**

Looking to get fit in 2026? FHN is here to help.

FHN has announced their Get Fit 2026 program which begins January 18 and runs through April 11. This free wellness program is designed to help participants have fun, get active, and work toward your best you.

You can take part in the program individually or with 3 others as a team, and prizes will be awarded to both the top 3 individuals and top 3 teams at the end of the program. But to be eligible for prizes, participants must attend one of the free kick-off health screenings on either January 13th from 3 to 6 p.m. or January 17th from 8 to 11 a.m. as well as another follow-up screening at the end of the program.

Points are awarded based on progress made from January to April in lowering Body Mass Index, or BMI, decreasing weight, and overall cholesterol level. Points will also be given for tracking healthy habits, completing quizzes, and attending Get Fit events.

Registration also comes with a list of local fitness organizations providing free trial memberships for the 2026 Get Fit program.

For more information, or to register, visit this link: <https://www.fhn.org/getfit.asp>



## **INVASIVE WEED SPECIES SPOTTED IN STEPHENSON COUNTY**

A new invasive species of weed has been found in a corn field in Stephenson County. The Asian copperleaf is a summer annual that reproduces only by seed and is typically observed around the time of corn harvest, but can be identified around the time of soybean planting.

Asian copperleaf is closely related to native species of plants commonly found in grassy and wooded areas, but the invasive variety poses a risk by its ability to spread rapidly and choke out native plant life.

To identify Asian copperleaf, botanists say to look at the leafy tissue under the flowers. If it looks like a heart or egg with a pointed tip, it is likely the Asian copperleaf.

If you think you might have Asian copperleaf in your field, contact Kathryn Seebruck with the Illinois Extension office at (815) 986-4357 or [seebruck@illinois.edu](mailto:seebruck@illinois.edu)



## DONATE CHRISTMAS TREES TO HELP FISH POPULATION

Taking down the Christmas tree? The Illinois Department of Natural Resources would like to put it to good use.

Fisheries biologists are collecting live Christmas trees to be as fish habitat in Lake Le-Aqua-Na in Lena. Collected trees will be bundled together, weighted, and submerged in the lake providing critical habitat for multiple fish species and promoting algae growth for insects that attract fish for anglers.

Donated trees should be free of stands, lights, ornaments, and tinsel. No wreaths or garlands will be accepted.

Tree drop-off is already underway and runs through January 11th. Simply head over to Lake Le-Aqua-Na during regular park hours and follow the signs to the drop-off location.

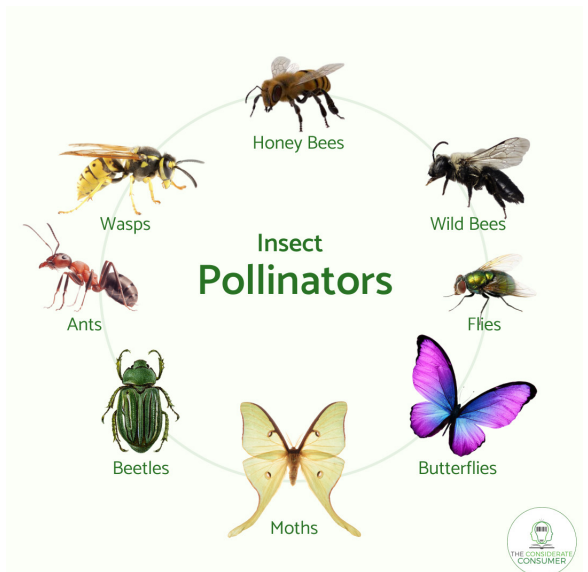
## POLLINATOR PRESENTATION COMING TO FREEPORT

There's more to pollination than just bees. Learn more about some of the other pollinators this Tuesday, January 6th at St. John's United Church of Christ, as Angella Moorehouse gives a presentation on the pollinator photo survey project for the Northwest Illinois Bird Nature Alliance.

Moorehouse has worked for 29 years as a field representative for the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. And since 2018, she has been conducting photography surveys of flower visiting insects on 30 protected preserves in west-central Illinois. In 2023, Moorehouse also published Flower Bugs, a field guide for identifying flower visiting "true bugs."

The presentation on Tuesday will also give tips on how to identify and find the so-called "true bugs" like stink bugs, assassin bugs, plant bugs, and more.

Moorehouse's presentation begins at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, January 6th at the St. John's United Church of Christ in Freeport.



## ADULT BASKETBALL LEAGUE FORMING AT YMCA



Calling all hoopers. The Family YMCA of Northwest Illinois has announced a new co-ed adult basketball league.

The league will run on Sunday nights for 7 weeks from January 11 to February 22, skipping Super Bowl Sunday.

Registration is \$750 per team for non-members, but if your team captain is a YMCA member, registration is only \$650.

You can register in person or online. For more information, or to register a team online, visit <https://freeportymca.org/elementor-8535/>

## **IN CLOSING...**

Before we close out this week's podcast, we remind you to check out the special weekly interview we posted this past Tuesday. Freepod hosts Tim and Becky Connors sat down with me as we all looked back at some of the highlights from the interviews we conducted in 2025. This coming Tuesday, Tim Connors sits down with Mike Marten from Mort's Bar & Grill. Mort's has been a downtown Freeport institution for decades and Mike has been intimately involved with the revitalization efforts happening downtown. That interview will be available starting at noon on Tuesday, January 6th. You can find it on our website, [www.freepod.org](http://www.freepod.org), or wherever you get your podcasts from.

We'd also 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 Mass Communication department at Highland Community College for producing this podcast.

As always, please like us on Facebook, subscribe on the podcast platform of your choice, and share with your friends. If you'd like to make a tax-deductible contribution to support local news content, please visit our website at [www.freepod.org](http://www.freepod.org).

This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.



# **FREEPOD**

**The news you've been missing.**