



**25 April  
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.

Quick reminder: we want to hear from you! We have a short survey online to help us understand how we're doing at giving you the news you've been missing. It'll only take about 5 minutes and you can find it at our website, [www.freepod.org](http://www.freepod.org). We'd really appreciate your feedback, so please respond if you can!

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.

### **“Non-Sanctuary County” resolution passed**

The Stephenson County Board approved a resolution on April 18<sup>th</sup> declaring itself a non-sanctuary county on Thursday. It passed similar language that has been approved by Ogle and Winnebago counties.

The resolution was approved on a 10 to 6 vote and although debate on both sides was offered, the resolution itself doesn't create any new laws.

The text of the resolution also calls for the repeal of the Illinois TRUST Act, which was passed under Illinois then-Governor Bruce Rauner. This state law prohibits local law enforcement from arresting or detaining a person due to immigration status unless a warrant has been issued by a judge. Andrew Chesney, Illinois State Senator for the 45th District, which includes Freeport, is the chief sponsor of Illinois Senate Bill 3596 to repeal the TRUST Act.

As noted in earlier podcasts, FREEPOD is exploring the state of immigration in Stephenson County from multiple perspectives and we will feature reports on the topic in future episodes.

### **Street work equipment and training enhancement**

Two resolutions that outlined a significant intergovernmental agreement with Freeport Township have been passed by the Freeport City Council.

The City has been actively pursuing innovative strategies to enhance street maintenance capabilities while also contributing to the vocational training of young people in the community. A large part of this effort has been an ongoing public-private partnership with Midwest Contractors and the involvement of candidates from the Boys and Girls Club Yield program. This collaboration aims to provide practical, hands-on training in various aspects of street maintenance to equip young people with valuable skills for their future careers.

In a notable development, Freeport Township agreed to participate in this collaboration by funding the purchase of a Hot Mix Recycler Heated Box. Priced at \$23,300, the Hot Mix Recycler Heated Box is crucial for enhancing street maintenance operations and represents a generous contribution from the Township. It is a vital addition to street maintenance as it improves efficiency by enabling deployment of two separate pothole patching crews. This will be important as the City embarks on the most aggressive paving program in recent history, aiming to complete 6.5 miles of road resurfacing in 2024.

### **Ribbon cuttings**

A number of businesses in Freeport have ribbon cuttings scheduled. Upcoming events include the La Patrona Mexican Cantina & Grill at 1725 Ihm Blvd on May 3rd at 11 am and Flachtmeier Monument Company at 1108 S. West Avenue on April 15 at noon. There's also a ribbon cutting for the new location for This Is It Eatery at the Hampton Inn at 109 S. Galena Avenue tomorrow, April 26 at 10:45 am.

### **Chicken Run**

The Family YMCA of Northwest Illinois is excited to host their 14th annual Spring Chicken 5K race, May 4 beginning at 9:00 AM. This race is the first of the Run All 5 Race Series in Freeport!

If you want a t-shirt, you'll need to register at the YMCA website by end of tomorrow, Friday April 26<sup>th</sup>. Packet pick-up is scheduled for Friday, May 3 from 5:00-6:45 PM or on Race Day from 7:30 – 8:45 AM.

All proceeds from this race go towards our annual Strong Kids Campaign, which helps to strengthen our community through youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. The campaign awards over \$50,000 in scholarships, allowing families to partake in the Y's programs without worrying about the cost.

### **Housing Demolition Update**

You might have recently noticed that several vacant, distressed buildings are being removed by the City.

According to Freeport Community Development Director Wayne Duckman, progress is being made in the demolition of blighted properties using the FEMA Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant. FEMA, which is the Federal Emergency Management Agency, is the source of the funds for this demolition work.

To date, 26 properties have been demolished with at least 15 more scheduled to be demolished using the FEMA funding before it expires September 22 of 2024.

All demolition contractors have been selected through Freeport’s competitive bid process. Contractors performing the demolition work are Fischer Excavating, Kleckner Excavating, and Alber & Sons Earthworks.

Related to this work, Duckman indicated that the vacant housing project near Taylor Park School is currently owned by the Freeport Housing Authority. The city has submitted a grant to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources that would fund the demolition of these structures if approved.

The demolition of abandoned buildings is quite lengthy legal process. The City is committed to cleaning up these properties and remove this blight from our community.

A new business has opened in Freeport that likely is the first of its kind ever in the city. Freeport Botanicals is a State-licensed dispensary for T-H-C-A products and is located at 213 E. Stephenson St. The dispensary opened three weeks ago and now is open seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. during the week and noon to 5 p.m. on the weekends.

T-H-C-A is **not** marijuana – it is a non-intoxicating chemical present in cannabis.

Customers need to be age 21 and over to buy any products and must present a valid ID. Staff can answer any questions about their products and their uses.

### **Cranes!**

A pair of Whooping Cranes were recently spotted north of Ridott. This species is endangered, with estimated total numbers in the US estimated at around 500, 73 of which are part of the eastern migration population. The Cornell University Lab of Ornithology describes the Whooping Crane as the tallest bird in North America and one of the most awe-inspiring, with its snowy white plumage, crimson cap, bugling call, and graceful courtship dance. The species declined to around 20 birds in the 1940s but their number has grown through captive breeding, wetland management, and an innovative program that teaches young cranes how to migrate.

The two cranes that were spotted were second-year females, one with leg-bands that indicate she has been tagged to be able to follow her throughout her life and migrations. If you see one of these beautiful cranes, please do not approach them but stay in your vehicle and admire and take your pictures from there. Minimal human contact will help ensure the birds are not stressed and help save them as a species.



## **Binoculars for sixth graders**

Some Freeport sixth graders are more clearly seeing the beauty of our natural world, thanks to their teachers at Carl Sandburg Middle School and a grant from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology we just mentioned.

Instructor Luke Kramer applied for a grant from Cornell, so that he and his teaching partner, Dr. Kim Frank, could enhance outdoor education opportunities. They were thrilled to find out he was one of only 12 national winners. He received 10 free pairs of high-quality Celestron Binoculars, which the two High Academic Potential Program classes, consisting of 44 6th graders, will share on nature walks and birding trips as part of their curriculum.

Luke says, "I did not understand birds' role in the food chain, and how the continued over-development of natural areas and our own landscaping culture are directly connected to the major decline in bird populations over the past 50 years. Since then, I have incorporated this learning into my teaching and teamed with the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society about a native plant restoration project that I am working on with the student council."

On Earth Day, April 22, the sixth graders visited Oakdale Nature Preserve for some introductory birding lessons and migratory bird education. Luke says the binoculars will get regular use. He shares, "We go on 'nature walks' around the campus almost daily to take a break from academics and get the kids moving after sitting for a long period. They will be allowed to bring them out then, in addition to special outings."

## **Litter pickup**

Spring is here and with it the tradition of cleaning. A group calling themselves Pretzel Pickers have been cleaning up around town. This group began in 2021 following a community litter pick-up event sponsored by Greater Freeport Partnership. Kathy Wilken, Sharon Koch and Anne Mason decided to continue picking up litter the rest of the summer and over 30 members have joined their weekly picks. To date the group estimates they have removed over **4 tons** of litter from City streets.

In addition, the Pretzel Pickers join three other groups in Freeport who have "Adopted A Street" through a city program of the same name. The Lions Club, Voices, Mad Men, and the Pretzel Pickers have designated streets that they clean up at least 3 times a year. This program also places signs in those designated areas after the groups have kept them clean for 2 years.

The Pickers are planning special clean-ups this summer. The first clean-up is planned for June 20 at 6 p.m. The Pretzel Pickers will partner with the Boys and Girls Club, Aldermen Joy Sellers and Rachel Simmons to pick up litter in the Third Ward. Anyone who wants to help is welcome to join the Pretzel Pickers team!

## **Clean heat**

Speaking of Spring cleaning, there's an informative presentation coming up on clean and affordable heat and cooking. "Our Future Home" will be presented a week from today, Thursday May 2 to help

attendees learn how to make the switch to electric appliances, which can reduce your carbon footprint, lower energy costs, and protect your health.

This free event will also discuss the Illinois Clean and Healthy Buildings Act. This is an upcoming bill in the Illinois state legislature that would create a plan to reduce building emissions in Illinois.

The program is sponsored by the Citizen's Utility Board, League of Women Voters, the Environmental Study Group, and the Sierra Club. Mark your calendar for Thursday, May 2<sup>nd</sup> at 6:30 p.m. at the Freeport Public Library for this informative program.

### **Pretzel Fest**

The fourth annual Pretzel Fest kicks off this Saturday, April 27, in downtown Freeport. Celebrating all things pretzel, the event is from noon to 4 p.m. and there will be activities and snacks all day. Sights, sounds and mouth-watering smells will be plentiful as the annual barbecue competition takes place with vendors vying for the title. Music will be ongoing throughout the festival along with a yoga demonstration. Shops and restaurants will have specials to celebrate the historic importance of pretzels in our city.

Kiwanis Pretzel Days is also next Friday, at the corner of Stephenson and Park. Buy some pretzels and support the Kiwanis many wonderful community projects.

In honor of Pretzel Fest, here's your trivia for this podcast: Many believe that the pretzel was created by an Italian monk, who'd reward children for learning their prayers since the shape of a pretzel could signify joined hands during prayer. It also symbolizes love in some parts of the world since looks like a heart. According to legend, this may also be where we get the phrase "tying the knot."

### **Classic Film Series continues**

For all the classic movie lovers out there, you'll enjoy "The Magnificent Seven", 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 1960 western-style film stars Yul Brynner, Steve McQueen, and James Coburn. "The Magnificent Seven" screens next Wednesday, May 1 at 1:00 and 7:00 p.m. 2024 is the 14th year for the popular film series.

### **Looking ahead....**

As Earth Week wraps up, the City and the Freeport Park District are hosting an Arbor Day celebration tomorrow, Friday April 26, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Krape Park. Kiwanis Kids from local elementary schools will learn about trees and help plant them. Superintendent of Parks & Natural Resources Bruce Cubberley is a certified arborist and will guide the tree planting. Interactive learning stations hosted by the Master Gardeners from the University of Illinois Extension will also be set up in the Gunkel Shelter. All activities are free and the public is welcome to attend.

And we're looking forward to some good eatin'!

This week we're excited about the reopening of Maria's Pizza! This hometown restaurant at 922 W. Galena in Freeport has been closed for several years but is reopening Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays from 4:00 to 9:00 p.m. and Fridays and Saturdays from 4:00 to 10:00 p.m. They will be offering online ordering soon. As one commenter on Facebook mentioned, it'll be good to be patient as they open up since they're likely to be swamped with customers who've been waiting a good while for their favorite pizzas and other Maria's specialties.

Stephenson County Restaurant Week also began Monday and continues through next Wednesday, May 1 to celebrate the many great restaurants in Stephenson County. The County's second annual Restaurant Week celebrates the resilience and ambition of our restaurants and restaurateurs and all they continue to do to serve our region.

Many of the featured restaurants are offering specials that highlight long-time menu options or something new! This is a great time to try a place you've been meaning to try, patronize old favorites, and generally enjoy the quality restaurants of Stephenson County. Check out the whole restaurant guide at the website of the Greater Freeport Partnership (<https://greaterfreeport.com/visit/restaurant-week/>).

Lots of great eating ahead in Freeport!!

#### **Until next week...**

With that, time's up for this week but tune in again next week for more about Freeport businesses, City plans and progress, area rewards and recognition, local impacts related to state and national news, and more.

As we say each week, FREEPOD couldn't come to you without the help of many local supporters. We're especially appreciative for the Mass Communications Department at Highland Community College for producing this podcast. April has also been National Volunteer Month so we'd like to shout out a special thank you to our many liaisons and reporters for the time they volunteer to bring the news to you. We appreciate all your help and literally couldn't do FREEPOD without you. Thank you, Highland and Team FREEPOD!

If you have story suggestions or would like to donate to support FREEPOD (now tax-deductible), visit our website at [www.freepod.org](http://www.freepod.org).

***Listen next week for more news you've been missing!***