



Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Lynn Feaver...

And I'm Alan Wenzel...

In this week's episode, the Freeport Police Department moves all neighborhood watch meetings to a central location...

Travelers prepare for a major roadway disruption in Jo Daviess county...

And the Freeport Park District gives kids the chance to learn discipline and self-defense with a new summer offering.

This is Freepod for June 18th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

Before diving in to the news this week, please indulge us as we would like to wish our good friend and loyal listener Marjorie Phillips a very happy belated birthday. Marjorie is a philanthropist and lover of the arts in our community and during her life she has made countless contributions to filling our corner of the world with the joys of music, fine art, and, more than anything else, kindness. Happy 99th Birthday, Marjorie!



NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH MEETINGS MOVING TO CENTRAL LOCATION

The Freeport Police Department is making a change to its Neighborhood Watch program in an effort to strengthen community engagement and improve public outreach.

Beginning in August, all Neighborhood Watch meetings will be held at the Freeport Public Library. Police officials say ward meetings will continue on their regular schedules but will move from their current locations to the library. Meetings scheduled for June will remain at their existing locations, while no meetings will be held during July.

The department says the move supports its growing partnership with residents and local businesses while allowing officers to share more information through technology-enhanced presentations. The new setting will also provide an opportunity for Freeport's new Community Lieutenant to meet with residents and discuss neighborhood concerns.

Police leaders say the library offers a familiar civic gathering space and will help expand communication about department programs, services, and public safety initiatives throughout the community.

For meeting schedules and additional information, residents are encouraged to follow the Freeport Police Department's social media channels.

FREEPORT FIRE REQUESTS AN INCREASE IN AMBULANCE FEE

Ambulance rides in Freeport could soon become significantly more expensive under a proposal being considered by city officials.

The Freeport Fire Department is recommending an increase in ambulance service fees from \$1,200 to \$2,000 for city residents and from \$1,700 to \$2,500 for non-residents. The mileage charge would also increase from \$14 to \$20 per mile.



Fire Chief Tom Korte says the proposed changes would bring Freeport's rates more in line with neighboring communities and help the city recover more costs from insurance providers. The department responds to roughly 4,000 ambulance calls each year and has not adjusted its rates in about four years.

Officials say the additional revenue would support the city's capital improvement fund, which helps pay for costly equipment such as ambulances that now exceed \$400,000 each and fire trucks that can cost more than \$1 million.

The proposal will be reviewed by the Committee of the Whole before advancing to the Freeport City Council for possible action next month.



CARROLL COUNTY DEPUTIES HONORED FOR BRAVERY

Three Carroll County Sheriff's deputies are being recognized for extraordinary bravery.

Deputies David Geesey, Ryan Guenzler, and Tyler Todd recently received Illinois' Law Enforcement Medal of Honor, one of the state's highest awards for police officers. The honor recognizes their actions during a dangerous incident on June 26th of last year involving a high-speed pursuit of a stolen vehicle.

According to state officials, the suspect rammed Deputy Tyler Todd with the vehicle and then drove toward Deputies Guenzler and Geesey. The deputies acted to stop the threat and then immediately provided medical aid to the suspect until additional help arrived.

Governor JB Pritzker presented the awards during a ceremony in Springfield, where 19 officers from six agencies across Illinois were honored for acts of heroism performed in 2025.

The Carroll County deputies were praised for their courage, quick decision-making, and commitment to protecting the public under extremely dangerous circumstances.

DEMEESTER'S GREENHOUSE TO GO UP FOR AUCTION

A longtime northwest Illinois business is preparing to close its doors after nearly a century of serving the community.

The owners of DeMeester's Greenhouse in Freeport announced they will retire after 94 years of family operation. In a message to customers, the family said they have spent the past four years trying to sell the greenhouse, but have now decided to move forward with a public auction.

The auction is scheduled for Saturday, July 18th at 10 a.m. The family thanked customers, employees, and the community for their support through generations of business.

Known for its greenhouse plants, seasonal flowers, and apple orchard, DeMeester's Greenhouse has been a fixture in Stephenson County for decades. Owners say while they'll miss growing plants and watching the orchard flourish, they'll miss the people they've met along the way the most.

The retirement marks the end of an era for one of Freeport's longtime family-owned businesses.



MAJOR BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION ON US 20

Drivers traveling between Dubuque and East Dubuque should prepare for significant traffic changes beginning Monday, June 15th.

The Iowa Department of Transportation is starting a major rehabilitation project on the Julien Dubuque Bridge, which carries U.S. Highway 20 across the Mississippi River. From 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. weekdays, eastbound traffic will be rerouted to the nearby Dubuque-Wisconsin Bridge, adding about 10 minutes to travel times. Westbound traffic will remain unaffected during this phase.

In July, the bridge is expected to close completely for several weeks, with work continuing through mid-September. The project includes structural repairs and improvements designed to extend the life of the historic bridge.

Business owners in East Dubuque are expressing concern about the impact on summer tourism and customer traffic. To help residents and visitors, Iowa DOT is offering a free reservation-based shuttle service between Dubuque and East Dubuque during the closure.

Officials encourage motorists to plan ahead and allow extra travel time throughout the construction period.

NIBNA RELEASES CRANE COUNT NUMBERS

Stephenson County volunteers took part in a long-running wildlife monitoring effort this spring during the 2026 Annual Midwest Sandhill Crane Count.

Twenty-three volunteers surveyed 13 locations across the county on the morning of April 18th, recording a total of 44 sandhill cranes, including 13 breeding pairs. That's below the typical count of 60 to 70 cranes observed in recent years.



Organizers say several factors may have contributed to the lower numbers, including unusually warm weather earlier in the spring that may have prompted cranes to migrate sooner than normal. More than six inches of rain fell in Stephenson County during the week leading up to the count, creating flooded conditions that may have affected nesting areas and crane activity.

The citizen science project is coordinated locally by Teresa Smith and is part of the Annual Midwest Sandhill Crane Count, a program sponsored by the International Crane Foundation. The count began in Wisconsin in 1976 and has included Illinois participants since 1994, helping researchers track crane populations and habitat trends across the region. Locally, the Northwest Illinois Bird & Nature Alliance sponsored the event.



HIGHLAND RELEASES DEAN'S LIST FOR SPRING 2026

Highland Community College has announced its Dean's List for the Spring 2026 semester, recognizing 274 students for outstanding academic achievement.

To earn Dean's List honors, students must complete at least 12 credit hours and maintain a grade point average of 3.25 or higher. 106 students achieved a perfect 4.0 GPA to receive Highest Honors, while 109 students earned GPAs between 3.5 and 3.99 and were awarded High Honors. Honors recognition was given to 59 students with GPAs between 3.25 and 3.49.

The list includes students from throughout northwest Illinois, including Freeport, Galena, Stockton, Lena, Pearl City, Dakota, Orangeville, Warren, Savanna, Mount Carroll, and many other communities served by the college.

Highland Community College officials say the recognition reflects the hard work, dedication, and academic excellence demonstrated by students during the spring semester. The college serves students across the region through transfer programs, career and technical education, workforce training, and continuing education opportunities.

STEPHENSON COUNTY FAIR BOOKS AVAILABLE NOW

The countdown is on for the 2026 Stephenson County Fair, and organizers are encouraging residents to start planning now.

This year's fair runs July 21st through the 25th at the Stephenson County Fairgrounds in Freeport and will feature livestock shows, youth exhibits, grandstand entertainment, carnival attractions, and family-friendly activities.

Anyone interested in entering exhibits can pick up a Fair Book at locations throughout the county, including the Freeport Public Library, Stephenson County Farm Bureau, University of Illinois Extension Office, Farm and Fleet, and Citizens State Bank locations in Freeport and Lena.

Fair Guides, which include schedules and event information, are also available at dozens of businesses and community locations across the area.

The fair's theme this year is "We'll See EWE at the Fair," highlighting the event's agricultural roots and community spirit. Organizers say now is the perfect time to review entry requirements and make plans to participate in one of Stephenson County's biggest summer traditions.





CFNIL GRANTS OPENING SOON

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS

Nonprofit organizations across northwest Illinois will soon have an opportunity to apply for community grant funding through the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois.

Applications for the foundation's 2026 Community Grants Program will open June 25th and remain available through August 20th. The program supports projects and organizations working to improve the quality of life in local communities through education, health, human services, arts and culture, community development, and other charitable initiatives.

To help applicants prepare strong proposals, the foundation is offering a series of grant seeker meetings, application work sessions, and workshops focused on evaluation planning and budgeting. Both in-person and virtual options will be available.

Foundation officials say the goal is to provide support throughout the entire grant-writing process, from developing an idea to submitting a completed application.

Organizations interested in applying can learn more and register at https://www.cfnil.org/community?utm_content=379920670&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&hss_channel=fbp-108680242495116

SMALL FOOD PANTRIES GET ACCESS TO A NEW GRANT

Small food pantries and soup kitchens across Illinois may soon receive additional help through a new state grant program aimed at fighting hunger.

Illinois Treasurer Michael Frerichs has announced the Charitable Trust Hunger Relief Grant Program, which will provide grants of up to five thousand dollars to ten nonprofit organizations that operate without full-time employees. The funding can be used to purchase food for residents in need.

Applications opened June 1st and will remain available through July 31st. State officials say the program comes as many food assistance organizations are seeing increased demand following reductions in federal food aid programs, including SNAP benefits.

The grants are funded through Illinois' Charitable Trust program and are designed to help small, community-based organizations continue serving families facing food insecurity. More information and application details are available through the Illinois Treasurer's Office.



CARROLL COUNTY CONTINUES TO SHINE IN AGRICULTURE

Agriculture continues to be a bright spot for Carroll County's economy.

New USDA data shows Carroll County farmers produced some of the highest wheat yields in Illinois during the 2025 growing season. The county averaged 111.6 bushels per acre, ranking second in the state and helping Illinois set a new record for win-

ter wheat production. Carroll County was also among the state’s top-performing agricultural regions, reflecting favorable growing conditions and strong farm management practices.

Agriculture remains a major economic driver across Carroll County, where corn, soybeans, wheat, and livestock production support local businesses and communities. Farm leaders say continued investment in crop management and technology has helped producers achieve record-setting yields despite weather challenges.

For Carroll County, the latest numbers highlight the strength and resilience of the local agricultural industry.

ILLINOIS RANKS 7TH IN EDUCATION

Illinois has earned its highest-ever national ranking for education, according to the latest KIDS COUNT Data Book from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The report ranks Illinois seventh in the nation for education, citing strong performance in areas such as eighth-grade math proficiency, preschool enrollment, and high school graduation rates. The annual study evaluates states using a variety of indicators that measure how children are doing in school and in life.

Education advocates say the ranking reflects Illinois’ continued investment in early childhood education and student support programs. However, the report also highlights ongoing challenges, including reduced access to early care and education and child and teen mortality rates that remain above pre-pandemic levels.

Overall, Illinois ranked 20th nationally in child well-being, a slight decline from last year, showing that while educational outcomes are improving, more work remains to support children and families across the state.



MUSIC ON
Debate Square
Thursday
6:30 PM
Seven Big Nights

June 25 th	 Kendra Swanson
July 9 th	 HCC Big Band with Bill Petersen
July 16 th	 Ukulele Express 815
July 30 th	 Lobbin Robbins
Aug. 6 th	 vanfunk
Aug. 13 th	 Southpaw Stance
Aug. 20 th	 John Hartman Jazz Alliance

BRING YOUR LAWN CHAIRS
AND ENJOY FREEPORT!

MUSIC ON DEBATE SQUARE SCHEDULE FOR SUMMER 2026

Freeport’s popular Music on Debate Square concert series is returning this summer with seven evenings of free live entertainment in downtown Freeport.

The concerts will be held Thursdays at 6:30 p.m. in Debate Square, beginning June 25th with singer-songwriter Kendra Swanson. Other performers scheduled throughout the summer include the Highland Community College Big Band with Bill Petersen on July 9th, Ukulele Express 815 on July 16th, Lobbin Robbins on July 30th, vanfunk on August 6th, Southpaw Stance on August 13th, and the John Hartman Jazz Alliance on August

20th.

Organizers are encouraging residents and visitors to bring lawn chairs and enjoy an evening of music in the heart of downtown. The free concert series is part of ongoing efforts to support community events and showcase local and regional musical talent throughout the summer season in Freeport.

SICK SUMMER MOTORSPORTS MAKING A STOP IN FREEPORT

Car enthusiasts will have a unique opportunity to see some of the nation's fastest street and drag racing vehicles when Sick Summer makes a stop in downtown Freeport tonight, June 18th from 4 to 7 p.m.

The popular five-day drag-and-drive competition, organized by Sick The Magazine, travels across the Midwest with competitors racing at multiple tracks while driving their cars on public roads between events. This year's route includes stops in Union Grove, Wisconsin, Byron, Illinois, and several other racing venues.

As racers travel between Union Grove and Byron, contest vehicles will be on display in the parking lot at 126 East Stephenson Street in downtown Freeport. Spectators are invited to park downtown, check out the high-performance machines, and meet participants.

The visit is expected to bring automotive enthusiasts and visitors to Freeport while showcasing a wide variety of custom-built race cars from across the country.



FIRST EVER QUAD AND SIDE-BY-SIDE RACING AT STEPHENSON COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

A new motorsports event is coming to the Stephenson County Fairgrounds this month as quad and side-by-side racing makes its debut in Freeport.

Kickabuda Promotions is bringing the family-friendly racing event to the ABC Supply Company Grandstands on Saturday, June 20th. Gates open to spectators at 2 p.m., with racing featuring classes for children, teens, adults, and even special divisions for women and riders age 40 and older.

Admission is five dollars, while pit passes are ten dollars. Organizers say racers will compete for payouts based on an 80-20 payback format, with classes ranging from youth quads to high-powered side-by-side machines.

Safety equipment, including helmets and protective clothing, is required for all competitors. The event is the first of two races planned this year at the fairgrounds, with a second race already scheduled for August 16th.

More information is available through the Stephenson County Fairgrounds and Kickabuda Promotions on Facebook.

FOOD WITH FRIENDS DINNER

Community members are invited to come together for an evening of food and fellowship later this month in Freeport.

The NAACP Freeport Chapter, the Boys & Girls Club of Freeport and Stephenson County, and the Foundation for Northwest Illinois are partnering to host Food with Friends, a free community dinner on Tuesday, June 23rd. The event begins at 5:45 p.m. at the Boys & Girls Club, located at 511 South Liberty Avenue in Freeport.



Organizers say the gathering is designed to bring residents together, strengthen community connections, and encourage meaningful conversations in a welcoming environment. While admission is free, advance registra-

tion is required, and seating is limited to 100 attendees.

The Boys & Girls Club and its community partners encourage residents of all backgrounds to attend and share a meal with neighbors. Those interested in participating should reserve their tickets as soon as possible due to limited space. Call the Boys & Girls Club at (815) 233-1600.



FREEPORT PARK DISTRICT

AGES 4-12 WELCOME!

8 WEEK SESSION

RESPECT SELF-CONTROL CONFIDENCE

LITTLE NINJAS

Thursdays • 6/25 - 8/13

5:30-6:00 pm

Krape Park Community Building

\$60 Resident Fee / \$65 Non-Resident Fee

Register by calling 815-235-6114 or Online: 214031-02

LITTLE NINJAS PROGRAM AT KRAPE PARK

Young residents looking to build confidence and stay active this summer have an opportunity through a new martial arts program offered by the Freeport Park District.

Master Sung Sop An and his team of black belt instructors are leading the Little Ninjas program, designed for children ages 4 through 12. The classes focus on teaching respect, self-control, discipline, and confidence while helping participants improve coordination, motor skills, and overall physical fitness.

Park District officials say the program combines fun and structured instruction to help children develop important life skills both on and off the mat.

Registration is now open. Parents can sign up online or call the Freeport Park District for more information. Organizers encourage interested families to register early as class space may be limited. Call 815-235-6114 or visit https://webtrac.freeportparkdistrict.org/webtrac/web/iteminfo.html?Module=AR&FMID=72788429&fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAYnJpZBExbDZ1N0dZNXo4UTZqT0JvMXNyGMGYXBwX2lkEDlyMjAzOTE3ODgyMDA4O-TIAAR4WYWrBzNoI9L8JA35ZIDUKRXJcgTUTnhv94t50lbWVxFN0vMD3ue_PsJlD8A_aem_Zi3ZUI5gaMI5aAWran-WMxQ

The Little Ninjas program is one of several youth activities being offered this summer to keep children active, engaged, and learning new skills.

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. Freepod host Becky Connors sat down with Barb Eberle of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic charity serving the Freeport community. Barb told Becky about some of the services, and processes, that the charity offers to anyone struggling in our community.

This coming Tuesday, I will share my interview with outgoing president Chris Kuberski, incoming president Dr. Jamal Scott, and chair of the Board of Trustees Doug Block from Highland Community College. The three spoke to me about the transition of leadership for the college and Dr. Scott’s vision for the future of Highland. That

interview will be available starting at noon on Tuesday, June 23rd, but you can listen anytime after that, as well. You can find it, and all of our other interviews, on our website, www.freepod.org, or wherever you get your podcasts from.

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 department at Highland Community College for producing this podcast.

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This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.



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The news you've been missing.