



**23 May  
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.

We're getting new 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.

### **Severe Thunderstorms Impact Freeport Area**

It was literally a dark and stormy night in Freeport on Tuesday. More than 4,000 Com Ed customers were without power as severe thunderstorms and strong winds rumbled throughout our region. The Freeport Fire Department responded to at least 50 calls for service, including requests for help with downed power lines. Many trees and branches succumbed to the windy weather, making some area homes and businesses difficult to access. Lincoln-Douglas elementary school was closed on Wednesday due to power outages.

ComEd crews are working to restore power as soon as possible. Some area neighborhoods received estimates that power would be restored to their homes by 3:00 p.m. today ([meaning THURSDAY when this will be heard](#)), but hopefully many of our listeners "had the lights on" well before now.

City workers will continue clean-up efforts, and starting Tuesday, May 28, there will be brush pickup for residents with storm debris.

Stay safe, FREEPOD listeners, and remember to have a plan for when severe weather strikes again.

### **National Travel & Tourism Week**

With Mother's Day, proms, graduations, and Memorial Day, May is a busy month for visitors to Freeport and Stephenson County. When they're here, our visitors stay at hotels, eat in restaurants, fill up their tanks with fuel, buy items they forgot at home, and take in some of our amazing attractions and events.

Visitors in Freeport and Stephenson County are really important to our economy. This week is National Travel & Tourism Week so it's a great time to highlight the many ways visitors have a positive impact on the businesses and quality of life in our area.

In 2023, nearly 50,000 room nights were booked in our three major hotels alone. According to the Illinois Office of Tourism, Stephenson County benefited from more than \$50 million in visitor spending in 2022, the most recent year for which we have state statistics. Tourism also contributes to more than 500 jobs in the county.

So far in 2024, we have seen great growth that's even stronger than the record-breaking numbers of 2023. In April 2024, for example, our three major hotels were completely booked 7 out of 10 nights. Hotel/motel tax generated by overnight stays is paid by the visitor, not local residents, and supports tourism both locally and for the State of Illinois.

Be ambassadors for Freeport and share our great City with your visitors this Spring and Summer!

### **Memorial Day...and mini-golf!**

Speaking of great things to do in Freeport, the three-day Memorial Day weekend starts Saturday and there's plenty to do.

The annual Memorial Day parade with about 75 units begins Monday, May 27 at 10:00 a.m. at the corner of Walnut and Main. The route goes east on Main Street and then turns to come west on Stephenson Street, ending at the courthouse. There'll be plenty of fun cars, floats, and marchers, and plenty of tossed treats for the kids.

Another fun option is a ride on the Silver Creek and Stephenson Railroad of Freeport. The legends of railroading are filled with drama, but the golden age of railroading had another, more unsung hero in the numerous branch-line trains that tied the small towns of what was once a more rural America to each other and the outside world. The train in Freeport is open this weekend for riders to experience branch-line railroading in a 1912 steam locomotive that takes riders on a three-and-a-half-mile round trip excursion into history.

Tickets are \$8 for adults, \$2 for kids under 12, and you can even get a \$20 ticket to ride in the engine's cab. Rides depart at 11:00 a.m., noon, and on the hour between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m. at 2954 S. Walnut Road in Freeport.

The Silver Creek and Stephenson Railroad of Freeport is a non-profit educational organization, dedicated to preserving America's historical railroad heritage. All aboard!!

And if you're looking to improve your putting prowess with some fun golfing competition, head to the eagerly awaited grand opening of the new Wing It! Mini Golf Course at Krape Park on Saturday from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

During Fall of 2023, construction began on a new, 18-hole miniature golf course to replace the existing miniature golf course that was over 30 years old. The new course features natural landscaping with native plants, interactive art displays, and is accessible to individuals in wheelchairs. All ages are welcome.

Admission is \$6 for youth 17 and under and \$7 for adults 18 and older. Regular operating hours begin at noon and the course is open daily until August 17 and on Saturdays and Sundays from then through September 29.

The grand opening will be a fun-filled day with a balloon entertainer, photo booth, and the chance to win prizes and giveaways (while supplies last) by playing a round of mini-putt. Fore!!

### **Boys & Girls Club Thanks Ted Odendahl**

King Community Campus staff recently recognized volunteer Ted Odendahl for his growing contributions to the facility. Odendahl is an avid gardener and has channeled that passion to plant and maintain a garden at the campus. Youth who attend programs at the campus assist with gardening activities.

To show their appreciation, staff from all three organizations housed at the campus dedicated a small boulder next to the garden in Odendahl's honor. James Rhyne, executive director of the Boys and Girls Club of Freeport and Stephenson County, one of the King Campus organizations, said, "Ted is truly an individual who is working on behalf of the community at large at the King Community Campus. He is a true servant leader." The other two organizations at the King campus are Amity Learning Center and NICA Head Start.

Odendahl first planted the garden across from the Freeport Area Church Cooperative for the Boys & Girls Club, then the other campus partners wanted to join so he moved the garden next to the campus playground. The vegetables and flowers harvested from the garden are available for campus families and staff. Ted also has planted flowers around the campus sign and other areas to help beautify the grounds and give it a more natural look. Two green thumbs up, Ted!

### **100 Women Who Care**

Members of 100 Women Who Care – Stephenson County voted at their second quarter meeting earlier this month to help rescue a program at the Boys and Girls Club of Freeport and Stephenson County. The nearly \$12,000 donation will benefit the YIELD or Young Adults in Education and Life Development program. It provides pre-apprenticeship training in construction.

The 14-week class combines hand-on classroom training at the Boys & Girls Club led by construction professionals and on-site experience working on home rehab projects through a partnership with Rebuilding Together.

James Rhyne, Boys & Girls Club executive director, said the 45 youth who have completed the program have all earned professional credentials. Despite its success, Rhyne said the YIELD program was in jeopardy because of a lack of funding. A state grant paid a stipend for one instructor but that was not enough. Thanks to the 100 Women donation, the second instructor can be compensated, and the students also can be paid for their time on the job. This will enable the program to continue.

If you are curious about 100 Women Who Care-Stephenson County, the group is open to any woman in Stephenson County. In their nine-year history, they have donated \$433,700 to 30 different organizations in Stephenson County. The group will next meet August 8th at the Muse on Cedar Creek. You can find out more by going to their website. Just search for 100 Women Who Care – Stephenson County.

### **State Bank Celebrates 25-year Anniversary**

In May of 1999, as what is now known as the “old” State Bank of Freeport was sold to larger banks, Freeporter Doug Cross felt the need for a more local bank with local decision makers. He contacted Foresight Financial, a local bank holding company, which ultimately funded the start-up of today’s State Bank. Foresight provided \$5,000,000 of seed money and today the Bank’s assets are almost \$400,000,000. State Bank is one of only two banks officially headquartered in Freeport. According to President and CEO Chris Schneiderman, the Bank’s purpose is to assist the local community with economic success through investment in the community and providing a safe place for financial assets.

The bank started with 2 employees and literally zero customers in part of a building near Highland Community College. The new building across from Pizza Hut was built in 2000 and employs 34 people serving over 6,000 customers. Over the years, the Bank has added many services, including Trust, investment banking, cash management, mortgages, and a Discover Club for seniors. The Bank has also been named a Top 10 Farm Service Agency lender in Illinois for its volume of agriculture loans.

The Bank kicked off its quarter-century anniversary with a new corporate identity and logo, designed to represent customers at the center of all its activities, as well as dedication to the community supported by its employees and a commitment to continuing growth to serve the area’s evolving needs.

State Bank has been very involved in community activities from the start. Community involvement is not only part of its officers’ goals but strongly encouraged for all staff, and community opportunities for involvement are actively sought. Over \$75,000 was contributed to local non-profits in 2023!

Happy Anniversary, State Bank, and thanks for 25 years of support for the Freeport area community!

### **Watch what you’re planting**

Tulips! Azaleas! Rhododendrons! Yew shrubs! Buckeye trees! Local gardening centers are where the stuff dreams are made of can be found in Spring. But, it’s worth doing a little homework before you make your plant decisions in sprucing up your yard, garden, or deck. Last week we mentioned that we’d take a moment today to talk about how to safely choose plants as gardening season swings into full bloom.

With pets and kids, even if they aren’t yours, it’s important to know that there are lots of plants that look great but can have toxic consequences. Toxic doesn’t always mean fatal, but can often be pretty uncomfortable!

As you’re deciding what to plant, think about where you’re planting. If you like daisies, you can certainly have them but be sure you’re putting them where curious toddlers or teething puppies can’t get to them: if they’re chewed on, they can cause vomiting, diarrhea, drooling, lack of coordination, and irritated skin. Lilies of the Valley are another that’s even more dangerous – they can even result in seizures and coma. And the flesh of the little red berries on those beautiful yew shrubs is nice for birds, but the seed in the middle could actually be fatal for Fido or the grandkids.

Another point to consider is what parts of any plant are dangerous, because not all parts are. For example, tomatoes are delicious and edible by anyone or any critter that isn’t actually allergic to them, but the leaves and stems are bad news for both dogs and cats. Not lethal, but not something you want to have to have addressed by a veterinarian!

One of the best resources for information on plant safety is the national ASPCA and just because they are involved with animals, remember that all their info is pretty much applicable to humans too. They have an exhaustive list of both indoor and outdoor plants, including trees and shrubs, at their website, [www.aspc.org](http://www.aspc.org). They also have a national poison control hotline at 888-426-4435. The website and number are noted in our script for today's episode. Here's to beautiful and SAFE gardening this Spring!

ASPCA website: <https://www.aspc.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants>

ASPCA hotline: 888-426-4435

### **Sign up for some healthy physical competition this summer!**

Your summer sports and other physical activity can help schools within FHN's service area! FHN's Miles and Minutes program encourages you to log various types of physical activity to win prize money for the school system of your choice. Anyone age 12 and older can join this free program - including student athletes!

As you log your minutes of physical activity for anything from biking to mowing the lawn, those minutes will automatically be converted into miles you can "give" to the school system of your choice within FHN's service area – the schools are listed on FHN's website at [www.fhn.org](http://www.fhn.org). This makes it easy to follow the competition, and prizes will be awarded in miles in two categories: the school system with the most average "miles" logged per participant, and the one with the most total "miles."

Miles are normalized to help ensure a more level playing field for schools of all sizes. First prize for each category is \$2000, second prize is \$1000, and third prize is \$500, and three random schools will also be drawn for sweepstakes prizes of \$300, \$400, and \$500.

The 2024 competition runs Monday, May 27 through Sunday, August 25, but you can log activity up to two weeks after completion. Just make sure your activities are logged by Sunday, September 8. Sign up online at [fhn.org](http://fhn.org).

This program, which was started in 2013, has racked up over 20 million minutes of all types of exercise and awarded over \$86,000 to local schools. So get out there and compete for local school systems to help them win cash prizes as you get some healthy exercise this summer!!

### **National Hamburger Day**

Ah yes, the hamburger. A baked bun, beef patty, mustard, ketchup, onion, pickles, with optional cheese. Every May 28, National Hamburger Day celebrates America's most iconic food, with over 50 billion consumed every year.

Originating in Hamburg, Germany, the hamburger as we know it was developed in Seymour, Wisconsin, a town still famous for its hamburger heroics. Others think the name originates from a cruise company known as the Hamburg America Line, which served its passengers similar sandwiches in the mid-1800s. To this day, there is little agreement over who actually created the iconic food. However, there seems to be some consensus amongst historians that the food as we know it today truly gained popularity at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, an event that also gave us the ice-cream cone.

You can find everything about this delicious national holiday at their website, just search “National Hamburger Day” (<https://nationaltoday.com/national-hamburger-day>). From the country’s favorite topping – it’s cheese, to no one’s real surprise – to the rankings of our favorite burger chains, you’ll find plenty of fun facts all the ingredients for a great grill-out trivia game.

So next Tuesday, May 28, fire up the grill, gather your friends, and cook up some delicious burgers!

### **Freeport: home of the nothingburger**

Now, as the saying goes, we told you that story so we could tell you this one: How many times have we heard the word “nothingburger” on national news and entertainment programs when something turns out to be a big zero? It’s certainly become part of the national vocabulary. But do you know who coined the word? It was a Freeport native!

Hollywood gossip columnist Louella Parsons first came up with the word in 1942, which essentially equates an inconsequential situation with a hamburger missing its beef patty.

Parson’s real name was Louella Rose Oettinger and she was born in Freeport in 1881. Using the professional name Louella Parsons, she was an American gossip columnist and a screenwriter. At her peak, her columns were read by 20 million people in 700 newspapers worldwide. Parsons died in 1972, and her storied career was definitely NOT a nothingburger!

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

We have two reminders for the rest of this week before the long holiday weekend.

First, there’s the Workforce Connection Job Fair this afternoon, May 23, from 2:00 to 5:00 at the Boys and Girls Club of Freeport and Stephenson County at 511 South Liberty Avenue in Freeport. This is an opportunity to meet with a variety of local employers looking for both summer and full-time staff. On-site interviews will be available so bring plenty of resumes!

Second, the City of Freeport is sponsoring an East Side Clean-up Day tomorrow, May 24 from 8:00 a.m. to noon beginning at the intersection of E. Jackson and S. Hancock. Garbage bags and gloves will be provided. Volunteers are encouraged to bring bug spray, boots and hand wipes. Come help spruce up Freeport for the summer ahead!

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

As we close, we’ve got a shout-out for the 238 students who graduated from Freeport High School last Sunday in 90-degree sunshine at the Pretzels’ football field. Speakers included Salaiya Fleming, Max Krzeminski, and Rachel Sdao. They all emphasized that there are always struggles in life but even regrets can be positive if we learn from them, which may be especially meaningful for this class who

were just beginning high school as freshmen during the COVID pandemic. They all also stated that keeping good connections now and in the future is always important. Senior Corinne Schneiderman led the graduates in moving their cap tassels to the other side of their caps at the end of the event. Congratulations, graduates!!

FREEPOD host Tim Connors  
and friends at the 2024  
Freeport High School graduation



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 as well as our many liaisons and reporters for the time they volunteer to bring the news to 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!***