



**9 May  
2024**

Welcome to FREEDPOD, 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.

### **Aquin High School closes**

Administrators from the Catholic Diocese of Rockford and Aquin Catholic Schools have announced that Aquin Catholic High School will close at the end of this semester. The primary issues the Diocese faces are the shrinking financial resources of the school amid the decline of population demographics in the Freeport area and dwindling student enrollment.

The school is depleting available reserves and is currently operating at a deficit. If nothing is done and the school is allowed to continue "as is" for the school year beginning this Fall, the deficit will exceed \$400,000.

During a meeting, first with employees and then with parents, Dr. Kim White, Superintendent for Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Rockford, announced that beginning with the 2024-25 school year, the Diocese of Rockford will open a new "micro Catholic academy" in Freeport for pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. The small class sizes enable personalized instruction and individualized learning experiences.

Aquin High School classes will no longer be offered but students in grades 9-12 will be offered the opportunity to work with the diocese to attend other Diocesan Central Catholic High Schools. On a positive note, the micro school model does allow for expansion for grades 9-12 in future years.

Aquin teachers and staff are being invited to reapply for positions available and for which they are qualified at the new Catholic micro academy. The micro academy will be located in the same space as the current elementary grades.

Aquin Catholic Schools were established by Bishop Peter J. Muldoon in 1923. Originally known as Freeport Catholic Community High School, it began with 33 students. Enrollment for 2024-25 is down to just 18. In 2021, the Freeport Catholic Elementary School students were integrated into the Aquin Campus to help curb costs for both elementary and secondary school education. Enrollment in grades pre-K through eighth grade is currently 83. Enrollment in pre-K through eighth grades for the 2024-25 school year is 77.

### **Freeport high school tennis team wins NIC-10 trophy**

The Freeport High School Boys Tennis Team took home the NIC-10 trophy when they won Freeport's first conference boys tennis title in 29 years on Saturday, snapping Guilford High School's winning streak of 13 consecutive titles. The Pretzels last won the conference tournament in 1995, when they also edged out the same Rockford school.

The Pretzels dominated the NIC-10 this year, going undefeated in dual meets. On Saturday they picked up their second conference title in 54 years, finishing with 52 points to easily outdistance Auburn High School's second-place score of 45.2. Their score also bested defending champion Hononegah, as well as Belvidere North, Guilford, Harlem, Belvidere, Boylan, East, and Jefferson.

The Pretzels head to sectionals in two weeks. Their only sectional titles were in 1988, 1996, and 2001. With only one senior on this winning team, Freeport coach Ed Schradermeier looks forward to more trophies in the future.

This is the fifth league tennis title in Freeport history. The Pretzels tied Rockford West for first in 1964, the first year of the modern NIC-10, and also won in 1969 and 1970. We're including photos of the team in the script for this episode on our website. Congrats, Pretzels Tennis Team!!



***Freeport High School boys' tennis team members and coaches***

*Owen Helm #1 singles, Alex Cuatlatl #2 singles, Cadan DeJong and JC Herrera #1 doubles, Carlo Delavin and Diego Robles-Sanchez #2 doubles, Colin Helm and Charlie Wiedmeyer #3 doubles, Coaches Ed and Uli Schradermeier*

### **Lena Living Center and YMCA partner for free senior-oriented classes**

The Family YMCA of Northwest Illinois is not just for Freeport residents to use and here's another example proving that will benefit Lena residents. The YMCA will partner with the Lena Living Center to offer a free class on the fourth Thursday of each month from 10:15 - 11:15 AM at the YMCA on the campus of Highland Community College. Each class will be a different topic and led by a Living Center staff member.

The first class will be May 22 focusing on balance and fall prevention. Registration will be accepted online soon at the Y's website. Call 815-235-9622 for more information.

### **Spring clean-up continues**

Spring cleaning continues in Stephenson County. The Greater Freeport Partnership once again sponsored a countywide clean up from April 7-14 and many groups participated including Rotary, Tri-County School, Hughes Resources, Stephenson County Probation, VOICES, Mad Men, Pretzel Pickers, and numerous independent groups.

Honeywell sponsored a community clean up on April 20 with 5 crews in different areas including Taylor Park, the Boys' and Girls' Club, Knowlton Park, Westview Housing, and the neighborhoods surrounding the intersection of Carroll and Empire. 57 employees participated.

The City of Freeport is sponsoring an East Side Clean-up Day on May 24 from 8:00 a.m. to noon beginning at the intersection of E. Jackson and S. Hancock. To sign up call Randi Kohlbauer, Environmental & Regulatory Compliance Officer at the City's Water and Sewer Department, at 815-396-3548. Garbage bags and gloves will be provided. Volunteers are encouraged to bring bug spray, boots and hand wipes.

### **Mother's Day 2024**

Here is a friendly reminder from your friends at FREEPOD: This Sunday, May 12th is Mother's Day! Don't worry, though...you still have time to show appreciation to your mom, from sending a card to going all out.

Area florists, salons, boutiques, fitness facilities, eating establishments, and other businesses are putting together specials to simplify your gift giving. In addition to taking her to downtown Freeport to enjoy this Saturday's Pretzel City Winefest that we detail next, here are few more ideas if you haven't already finalized your plans:

- Fitness Lifestyles of Freeport is offering facials and massages at special prices for the holiday;
- Higher Grounds, will offer \$15 chair massages on May 11th from 10 am to 2 pm at their West Avenue location;
- And don't forget that a mini-vacation at the movies is a good choice -- the Lindo Theatre has several blockbusters on-screen right now to entertain you both, including the action comedy *The Fall Guy*, starring Ryan Gosling and Emily Blunt.

And although gifts are great, most moms would agree: time is the most valuable thing you can spend on her. Whether it is a meal together, a walk in the park, a special event, or an extended phone call, take the time to celebrate your mom or other moms in your life this weekend.

### **Pretzel City Wine Fest**

In addition to Mother's Day on Sunday, there's a LOT coming up this weekend in Freeport! Let's start with the Pretzel City Winefest this Saturday, May 11<sup>th</sup> we just mentioned. Hosted by the Greater

Freeport Partnership from noon to 4 p.m., the event features 12 retail locations that will be serving wine samples from Illinois, Wisconsin and Iowa wineries to patrons as they shop!

Tickets can be purchased online for \$25 at [greaterfreeport.com/events](http://greaterfreeport.com/events), the Pretzel City Winefest Facebook page, or on the day of the event.

Whether you purchase tickets before the event or at the door, check-in at Hilldale Deli (30 W. Stephenson St.) on Saturday to receive your Winefest glass, bag, and map of participating downtown boutiques and shopping destinations. The wine glasses can be taken out of the restaurant to stop in local stores as part of the Freeport Festival District.

Pretzel City Winefest is sponsored by generous community partners including Medical Grade Aesthetics, Hilldale Deli, Loeffler Wealth Management, Berner Foods, Savant Wealth Management, Mahoney & Mahoney, and Bocker Auto Group.

### **Migratory Bird Day**

One might say that every day is a good day to enjoy the beauty of our natural world. But another event this Saturday, May 11<sup>th</sup>, is an especially great day to appreciate birds, especially those that migrate through our area, like Baltimore Orioles and Rose-Breasted Grosbeaks. During peak migration periods, more than a billion birds may be in the air on a single night.

If you'd like to celebrate migratory birds and learn more about their journey, several area organizations have planned a family-friendly activity just for you. This year's Fourth Annual World Migratory Bird Day Event is from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Oakdale Nature Preserve, just south of Freeport on Cranes Grove Road. It is free and open to the public. Event co-hosts are the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society, the Freeport Park District, the Freeport Public Library, and the University of Illinois Extension. The theme is "Protect Insects, Protect Birds," which focuses on insects and their importance to bird life.

This event is open-house style, with ongoing educational crafts and activities for all ages and abilities at the Oakdale Pavilion. There will be stations about insect life cycles and bird beaks, a bird migration obstacle course, and stone painting crafts. On each hour – at 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., and 12:00 p.m.-- there will be outings to bird watch and look for insects on Oakdale's trails. Please meet at the Pavilion to join one of these outings, led by Audubon Society and Park District members. There will be water, snacks, and giveaways while supplies last. Please note that this is a rain or shine event.

If you can't participate in the Migratory Bird Day event, you can still help migratory birds along our regional route. Simply reduce your use of pesticides and fertilizers; maintain natural vegetation, such as forests and grasslands; and keep cats inside or on a leash. Since lighting plays an important role in birds' migratory signals, it's important to minimize any confusion due to artificial lights. You can help by turn off all unnecessary lights from 11 p.m. to sunrise until June 15<sup>th</sup>, including landscape lighting that lights up trees or gardens where birds may be resting. You can also close blinds at night to reduce the amount of light being emitted from windows.

### **Farmers Markets open this Saturday**

Many people look forward to the opening of Farmers Markets and both of the Markets located in Freeport will be opening this Saturday, May 11<sup>th</sup>.

The Stephenson County Farmers Market on Exchange St. in downtown Freeport will be open Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to noon and the Freeport Illinois Farmers' Market will in the CVS parking lot across from Aldi's will be open from 7:00 to 11:00 a.m. Both Markets will be open during these hours every Saturday until late Fall.

Vendors at both Markets will offer fresh seasonal produce, crafts, plants and much more. Both would be more great places to pick up something for Mothers' Day. Get ready for some delicious and delightful local offerings when you stop by on Saturday!

### **Mail carrier food drive**

Speaking of food, don't forget that also this Saturday, May 11th is the annual Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive established by the National Association of Letter Carriers in 1993. Each year, letter carriers across the country head out on their routes on the second Saturday in May to collect donations of non-perishable food items to benefit local food pantries. Since launching, this effort has grown into the nation's largest one-day food drive.

It's super-easy to help: just leave your donation of non-perishable food in a bag near your mailbox on the second Saturday in May, and your letter carrier will do the rest.

### **And speaking of mail delivery...**

Our local history expert reports that the first delivery of mail to Freeport residents' homes happened in the Spring of 1836 when Thomas Crane of Cranes Grove began collecting the mail from arriving stage coaches and delivering it on foot. In those days, the person receiving the mail had to pay the postage, not the sender. A delivered letter cost less than a penny, between about .19 and .25 cents.

Following this first local mail delivery initiative, U.S. President Millard Filmore appointed the first Post Master of Freeport in May of 1849. Our letter carriers have been helping us for nearly 190 years, and we hope you can help them on their annual food drive this Saturday.

### **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. We also appreciate our liaisons and reporters for the time they volunteer to bring the news to you – we 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!***