



**11 July
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.

Please continue to share about us on your social media and thank you for your enthusiasm – now here's local news you've been missing.

Tutty is here!

Freeport's annual Tutty Baker Festival begins tomorrow with a full weekend of family fun, community celebrations, and opportunities to support local businesses with special sales and events.

The festival is a family-friendly event, offering something for everyone. From Friday through Sunday you can enjoy a classic car show, live music performances, a lively parade, a diverse selection of food trucks, and a craft fair featuring local artisans as well as a 5k run and kayaking opportunities. Freeport's summertime fireworks are also a part of the festival, lighting up the skies in downtown Freeport at dusk on Saturday night. This highly anticipated event promises a delightful array of attractions and activities for all ages and admission is completely FREE!

For more information with the full schedule and all the details about the Tutty Baker Festival, please visit the official Facebook and Instagram pages (@TuttyBakerFestival).

Don't FLiRT with COVID!

As many listeners have heard, the coronavirus that causes COVID is notorious in its ability to mutate into new variants. The latest mutations are actually a sequel to the omicron variants from previous years and have been nicknamed FLiRT variants based on the technical names for their mutations, one of which includes the letters "F" and "L," and another of which includes the letters "R" and "T."

Since everyone's experience with COVID is different and influenced by a number of factors, it's difficult to quantify how many are experiencing more acute symptoms now compared with previous infections. Anecdotally, people are surprised at the extent of illness they have encountered from the latest subvariants. Symptoms have included recurring fever, elevated sinus pressure and headache, extreme

sore throat, and body-shaking chills. Others, though, have reported only mild symptoms that feel like seasonal allergy flare-ups.

Locally, there seems to have been an uptick in the number of COVID cases over the past few months, according to Margaret Kochsmier, infectious disease nurse specialist at FHN. However, the specific variant of the virus is not identified in all cases so it is difficult to determine if the FLiRT variants are a problem in this area. The national Centers for Disease Control (CDC) currently identifies Stephenson County as an area of low COVID prevalence. Due to common use of at-home COVID testing, actual case counts are difficult to determine.

Unfortunately, it seems that COVID cases will be with us into the foreseeable future. The key to avoid serious illness is to stay up to date on COVID vaccines. Remember, vaccines do not prevent infection but ramp your immune response to infection and greatly reduce the severity of symptoms, the risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID. Updated COVID-19 vaccines will be available from Moderna, Novavax, and Pfizer later this year.

The biggest risk factors for severe COVID infections are still lack of current vaccination, advanced age, and co-morbidities like obesity, smoking, and type II diabetes.

Stephenson County Fair

Monster trucks! Demolition Derby! Pig Scrambles and Rabbit Races! Fair food and a hot dog eating contest! Vintage vehicles! Hot dog eating contest! Faith at the Fair and face-painting! Antique tractors and a Legos competition! And much, much more!

For 170 years, the Stephenson County Fair has been a big event in this region and this year will be no exception. While many other county fairs in Illinois have closed down, our 2024 Fair looks like it will be one of the biggest ever – the downloadable document detailing the calendar and all of the events at the Stephenson County Fairgrounds is nine pages long! For that document and all the Fair deets, check them out online at <https://stephensoncountyfair.org/>

The Fair starts on Tuesday, July 23rd and concludes with a grandstand music performance at 8:30 p.m. on Saturday the 27th by *The Fortunate Sons*, the world's premier tribute to *Credence Clearwater Revival*. Based in Chicago, the band tours nationally and internationally to keep the tradition of CCR's timeless music alive. Using original vintage gear and instruments, accurate costumes, and spot-on musical ability, *The Fortunate Sons* instantly conjure up the full experience of seeing Credence in their prime.

We're really looking forward to the Fair and are glad we have a week to recover from all the fun we're planning to have at the Tutty Baker Festival!

Sound Thinking expands

If you've noticed tall metal towers in a number of locations throughout Freeport and wondered what they are, here's an update. They're gunshot detection towers that "listen" for gunshots and report them within just seconds to the Freeport Police Department. This can lead to quicker location of

threatening situations and gunshot victims, and their precise responses improve evidence collection for future use.

The Freeport Police Department is looking forward to soon be receiving expanded coverage of SoundThinking, the shots-fired platform that was initially implemented a few years ago. This technology allows officers to respond and investigate shots fired more effectively and efficiently. Freeport Police Chief Chris Shenberger said the expansion of Sound Thinking here almost doubles the coverage in the City that previously existed.

SoundThinking is a leading public safety technology company that delivers AI- and data-driven solutions for law enforcement, civic leadership, and security professionals.

Pool-a-Palooza

For a different kind of water recreation, if you're looking for some cool family fun over the weekend, head to the Freeport Park District's Read Park Family Aquatic Center, also known as the Read Park Pool, tomorrow night!

On Friday, July 12th the pool will be open for a night swim and poolside party from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. with beachball volleyball games, poolside games, and music. Concessions will be available and regular admission fees apply. Participants age 12 and younger must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian and proper swim attire is required.

This sounds like a splashing good time!

Glow Golf

There's more fun afoot at Krape Park on Saturday the 13th! Take your favorite foursome of kids of any age from toddlers to seniors and enjoy Glow Golf from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. at the brand new Wing It! mini golf course. The course will be transformed with glowing lights and as the sun sets, you can play a round in the dusk with glow-in-the-dark golf balls and complimentary glow sticks.

Standard admissions apply for this illuminated family fun event!

Sarah Buchmann, *Beautiful* at HCC

When Sarah Buchmann was cast in the lead role for Highland Community College's 49th Summerset production of the Broadway show *Beautiful – The Carole King Musical*, she knew it would be a memorable experience – for many reasons. But she kept one of them a secret.

She was excited about playing singer/songwriter Carole King, and she was especially thrilled to do it on the stage of Highland Community College. Her grandfather, the late Mike Dobbins, was the theater director at the Ferguson Fine Arts Center for many years in the 1970s and early 80s. Mike, who many of our listeners might remember, is often credited with helping to establish Highland's strong program, and Sarah is proud of her grandpa's legacy.

However, when Sarah auditioned, she never shared she had a Dobbins connection. “I was honest about my past theatre experiences and minor roles on stage,” says Sarah. “What I left out was that my grandfather, Mike Dobbins, had taught at Highland and was the director of theatre there. Summerset was his baby. I didn't want to come into the program as a legacy. I wanted to earn my spot – and not feel like I'd gotten into the program based on family history. I wasn't expecting a lead role or really anything in particular, but I felt great about my audition and was really trying to manifest something for myself this summer.”

Some of her fellow cast members – including Erin Schraeder, Ben Skipor, Addison Cross, and Ky Eckert – eventually noticed that she always sat in the same spot in the house, right in between the seats with her grandparents' names on them, and Sarah did finally share her history with the show's director Randy Haldeman after the very last show. “I wanted him to know what this show meant to me,” she said. “There's the family tie, there's Carole's importance in my life, and I felt so grateful for this experience and the opportunity to work with such amazing, talented people.”

Sarah's grandmother, Gail Dobbins, and mom, Melissa Dobbins Buchmann, were incredibly proud of Sarah, and thrilled to be back in Freeport for the show. Melissa grew up here and also performed on the Highland stage, and Gail was involved with costuming, marketing, and design for various productions before the family moved in the early 80s. Mike Dobbins directed Summerset shows from 1975 to 1982, including productions such as *Carousel*, *Godspell*, and *Showboat*, starring the famous William Warfield -- who sang the iconic song “Old Man River” in the Hollywood production of *Showboat* and came to Freeport as a special guest, joining the cast at Dobbins' request.

Thank you to Sarah for sharing her very personal experience... and thanks to Highland Community College for decades of dramatic excellence!

The sound of music is everywhere!

Beautiful is just one of the most recent musical treasures you can attend in Freeport! In addition to all the great music that will be part of the Tutty Baker Festival, Music on Debate Square tonight will pay tribute to the great big bands of the 40's with conductor Bill Petersen. Bring your lawn chairs and blankets and enjoy a swinging good concert!

Music Under the Stars Music on Sunday, July 14th at 7:00 p.m. in the Koenig Amphitheatre at Krape Park rounds out a long weekend of great music. The conductor for the Freeport Concert Band this week is Kevin Jensen. The featured vocalist is Betsy Baker and there will be a saxophone solo by Blaine Young. What a great way to end several days of performances of many different types of music right here in Freeport!

The week ahead....

As always, there's a lot going on this coming week. This Monday and every Monday from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m., you can enjoy great grilled burgers and live music with your favorite craft beer at Generations Brewing, Freeport's own craft brewer on South Adams Avenue.

Also every Monday from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. you can check out vintage cards, stock cars, and bikes at the Freeport Moose Lodge on Challenge Street right next to Cimino's. They'll also be having music and food to snack on as you visit with other motor enthusiasts.

It's Customer Appreciation Week at the Royal Pub on south Park Boulevard through Sunday the 14th! Grab a quarter-pound cheeseburger, bone-in wings, fish specials, salads and plenty of other delicious meals and watch the week's sports events in the bar.

And finally, for the young and young at heart, the next Wednesday Morning Movie at the Lindo Theatre is *Paw Patrol: The Mighty Movie*. It will screen at 10:00 a.m. on July 17th and admission is only \$2. Doors open at 9:00 a.m. for entertainment and games, and one auditorium at the theatre is dedicated for guests who may need more freedom to talk and move around than a traditional cinema setting allows.

Until next week...

As we close, we're pleased to announce that next week's Tuesday In-Depth Interview will feature FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Tim Connors interviewing Andrea Winter, Executive Director for the Greater Freeport Partnership. Andrea works on economic development efforts for the Partnership, including downtown Freeport beautification efforts, data analysis, business support regarding financial incentives and loan programs, and employer workforce development support. She and Tim will talk about the challenges and opportunities she sees in Freeport's future. Their conversation will be posted at noon on Tuesday, July 16th.

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!

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

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

Sarah Buchmann, *Beautiful* at HCC

(Submitted by Sarah Buchmann)

I had done some shows in high school, along with theatre classes, jazz band, and being involved in show choir. But when I saw that HCC was going to be doing *Beautiful*, I was super excited. Carole King's music has been a huge part of my life for so long. For years, I watched *Gilmore Girls* religiously, and I never skipped the opening credits as "Where You Lead" is one of those songs that just makes your heart feel full. When I joined my college a cappella group, our yearly audition song was "One Fine Day", and it was a constant piece in our performance sets. Last December, I turned to "Will You Still Love Me?" to get me through relationship struggles and finding a sense of purpose (both Carole's version and Taylor Swift's!). I turned to the *Tapestry* album to get me through the rest of the winter and when I found out that Summerset would be putting on *Beautiful*, it just felt like fate.

I auditioned somewhat on a whim. It had been about 6 years since I had been in a show, and about 10 years since I'd had even a speaking line – my roles in show choir and musicals had always been in the ensemble, and my only "speaking" role was when I was 14 in my high school's production of *Leaving Iowa*, as the Civil War reenactment tour guide and a waitress. So, not much. That being said, as a teacher at Freeport Middle School, I've also been heavily involved with the musicals we've put on there. Both *Moana Jr.* and *Aladdin Jr.* were passion projects of mine and Cheri Crawford – she directed and I assistant directed, helped with music, and choreographed. It's not like I've been out of the theatre scene – I've just been backstage.

During the audition, I was honest about my past theatre experiences and minor roles on stage. What I left out was that my grandfather, Mike Dobbins, had taught at HCC and was the director of theatre there in the 70s and 80s. He had been highly involved with the Summerset program for years with my grandmother Gail Dobbins. Summerset was his baby. I didn't want to come into the program as a legacy. I wanted to earn my spot – and not be caught up in the politics of nepotism and feeling like I'd gotten into the program based on family history. I wasn't expecting a lead role or really anything in particular, but I felt great about my audition and was really trying to manifest something for myself this summer.

As the show progressed, I let a few of my SUPER talented cast members know how much the show meant to me. Some of them had noticed that I always sat in the same spot in the house – right in between the seats with my grandparents' names on them. It felt like when I sat in the theatre, they were right there with me. Or, with the renovations happening at HCC, some of the old show placards were out in the hallways – the one for *Show Boat* was on top, which was a show that all members of the Dobbins side of my family were involved in, from my grandparents to my uncles. And when we entered the dressing rooms to do makeup, my grandmother's collages of pictures and programs showcased my grandfather, my grandmother, and several other actors and faces I'd known from their stories. My seat in the make up room was always next to where my grandfather could see me. When I got up on stage for rehearsals, I always looked to his seat in row D. I'm not one to believe in guardian angels, but it felt like he was watching me.

I did (finally) tell my director, Randy Haldeman, about my grandfather after the very last show. I didn't want him to think any less (or more?) of me, but I did want him to at least know what this show meant

to me. There's the family tie, there's Carole in my life, and there's the thrill of having my very first starring role after a 6 year hiatus from acting. I felt so grateful for this experience and the opportunity to work with such amazing, talented people. I could not be more proud of the people beside me on stage, particularly Erin Schraeder, Ben Skipor, Addison Cross, and Ky Eckert. I would not have been able to get through the last 7 weeks without them! And, of course, my friends and students who came out to support me. I think the funniest part of being a part of this production was the audience response to Carole's mother's final line at Carnegie Hall, "Can you believe she wanted to be a *teacher*?" For those who know me and the pride I take in my career as a teacher, it was absolutely hilarious and always got a big laugh. But ultimately, I am so glad to be a part of the theatre community again, and I can't wait to continue working with the Summerset program.

– Sarah Buchmann