



**24 April
2025**

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 updates on what's happening in our community.

You can find us on Facebook as well as our website (www.freepod.org) and the website of our NPR partner WNJI Northern Public Radio (www.northernpublicradio.org), so please visit us there and continue to share about us on your own social media. Thanks for your support! Now let's see what's going on.

City news – wells and trees

The Freeport City Council has approved changes to City Ordinances regarding wells and septic systems, including requiring authorization for all wells, cisterns, geothermal wells, or other groundwater collection device. The Council also confirmed that septic tanks, privy vaults, cesspools, and private sewage disposal systems may not be installed in the City.

The Council also approved the removal of 31 dangerous trees in the City's right-of-way in 2025. Many of these trees pose a significant liability when they come down during storm events. The City has successfully reduced storm damage with this program in recent years. Homer Tree Service will be performing removals this year.

Highland Community College funding update

In response to communications from the Trump administration, the Highland Community College board has voted to remove reference regarding Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion—also known as DEI—from College materials. College President Chris Kuberski explained that since 65% of Highland's students receive federal aid, Highland really had no choice in complying in order to be assured of ongoing federal funding for \$4.8 million of Highland's \$16 million annual budget, or about 30% of the total.

Stephenson County Restaurant Week

The return of Stephenson County Restaurant Week begins tomorrow, April 25th and continues through next Sunday May 4th. During this 10-day event, patrons are encouraged to seek out dining options from

area restaurants that are offering featured dishes they have selected to highlight their businesses. Dine-in, delivery and carry-out options are available at various locations.

Freeport and Stephenson County are home to more than 90 restaurants, cafés, bars, lounges, and delis, each with a unique flavor or environment. The Stephenson County Restaurant Guide can be found online and in participating restaurants in the county and includes featured specials from restaurants as well as a complete contact listing. The online guide can be found at greaterfreeport.com/restaurantweek.

You can also win cash for enjoying our restaurants! Restaurant Week participants can take photos of the specials they enjoy and post on social media with the hashtag #StephCoEats. On May 6, a winner will be chosen from those who used the hashtag and awarded \$100 in Partnership Cash. Stephenson County Restaurant Week is hosted by the Greater Freeport Partnership.



New K-9 officer at the Freeport Police Department

The newest officer with the Freeport Police Department is a little "ruff" around the edges but he's ready for action in his new role.

Enzo the K-9 officer is now on the beat with his partner Officer Kevin Krahmer. The pair completed their six-week basic class and earned their certification through the International Police Work Dog Association. Enzo and Officer Krahmer will be a big asset to fighting crime in Freeport as well as promoting the department and community relations.



HCC Foundation Celebration 2025

Join the Highland Community College Foundation on Saturday, May 10th at a celebration fundraiser. The cocktail-style reception will feature hearty bites and a curated selection of drinks from the Lena Brewing Company as well as a silent auction for which items can be bid on without being present.

This year's celebration highlights the fine arts in honor of Summerset's 50th anniversary. The event will feature a brief program with the Del Scheider Award presentation and live musical performances.

The event begins with check-in at 4:30 p.m. at the Welcome Center in Building H on the campus and attire is business casual. For reservations, please visit the college website at www.highland.edu and click on Foundation Events on the home page.



Jersey Mike's opens

Jersey Mike's Subs Freeport location across from Menards on Route 26 south of town is now open from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. daily. Customers will be able to place orders for fresh sub sandwiches and other menu items in-store and online or through the Jersey Mike's app.

To mark the location's grand opening, franchise owner Mark Michalak will hold a fundraiser through Sunday, April 27 to support Freeport schools. For details, be sure to stop by before Monday.

Historical Society Museum tree wins Tree of the Month

The Natural Land Institute's Legacy Tree Program has named a Yellow Birch tree at the Stephenson County Historical Society Museum and Arboretum in Freeport as its Tree of the Month for April. The State Champion tree was nominated by Mark Luthin, who grew up in Freeport and now resides in Belvidere. Luthin, a Board of Trustee for Natural Land Institute, brought this special tree to the attention of the organization's executive director last year.

This Yellow Birch was first listed on the Illinois Big Tree Register in 1983. It was last measured in 2022 and had a circumference of 6.5 feet, a height of 61 feet, and average crown spread of 38.5 feet.



According to the Natural Land Institute, the Yellow Birch is native in Northeastern North America including northern Illinois where the tree is very rare. It boasts beautiful bark that is coppery or silvery depending on whether it is wet or dry.

This tree is one of many unique and historic trees planted by Oscar Taylor on the grounds of his estate on the east side of Freeport. Taylor and his wife Malvina were early pioneers in Freeport and built their large stone, Italianate home on 14 acres of land just outside the city in 1857.

Another Spring gardening update

Do you have perennial plants that live year after year in your landscape? Did you know spring is the preferred time to divide them? Exceptions are iris, which are divided after flowering, and peonies and day lilies that are divided in late summer or early fall.

When plant growth resumes in the spring you can divide all other perennials. Dig the entire plant and divide the healthiest portion into smaller clumps by working it apart with your fingers or by making small cuts with a knife. If the plant clumps are large and dense, they can be cut apart with a spade. The new clumps can be the size of either a quart or gallon size perennial you would purchase in the store.

One to two divisions can be put back in the original hole and the other divisions should be used elsewhere – or given to friends and neighbors! After replanting, divisions should be watered thoroughly and protected from drying out.

The primary purpose of dividing plants is the rejuvenation of the perennial planting to keep it looking its best and performing the way it was intended. Consider staggering divisions, a few plants this year and a few plants next year, so that the entire garden does not need to be divided in the same year.

If you have questions about dividing perennials or any other gardening or yard topics, call the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Helpline at 815-235-4125. That's 815-235-4125.

YMCA annual fundraiser

The YMCA invites one and all to their annual fundraiser from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 8th at Big O's On The Hollow to enjoy delicious cupcakes paired with a variety of cocktails. For just \$15.00,

enjoy four different cupcakes paired with four different cocktails, or for \$2.00 more you can try all 6! Tables are also available for purchase.

The event also includes an auction and if you stay for dinner afterwards, 10% of your bill will go to The YMCA Annual Strong Kids Campaign. Tickets can be purchased at the YMCA or online at <https://freeportymca.org>

Drug Take Back Day

FHN and the Freeport Police Department are sponsoring National Prescription Drug Take Back Day this Saturday, April 26th from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Prescription drugs can be dropped off at drive-thru station at the Freeport Police Department at 320 West Exchange Street and will be safely disposed of without endangering people, pets, or area groundwater supplies that might be affected if drugs are flushed down toilets or dropped into drains. Pills and patches are accepted but liquid drugs and needles are not.

NAACP Community Resident Meeting

The Freeport Branch of the NAACP -- together with Greater Freeport Partnership, the United Way of Northwest Illinois, Healing Illinois, and the Freeport Area Housing Providers Association -- is hosting a community resident meeting next Thursday, May 1st. The public is invited to discuss topics including a variety of topics around safe, stable, and affordable housing including housing availability, blighted homes, code violations, and more.

The meeting will be held from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the Stephenson County Farm Bureau building.

The poster is for a community resident meeting. It features a red and black color scheme. At the top left, a quote reads: "We envision a community where everyone deserves access to safe, stable, & affordable housing." Below this, it says "Let's Discuss Our Communities" and lists topics: "Shortage of Affordable Housing", "Blighted Homes", "Code Violations", "Ignored Resident Concerns", and "AND MORE!!". It then says "Let Your Voice Be Heard!". In the center is a small illustration of a house. To the right of the house is the NAACP Freeport Branch logo. Below the house, it says "OPEN TO ALL FREEPORT RESIDENTS!". At the bottom left, it says "Please Join Us!! May 1, 2025" and lists the times: "6:00-6:30pm - Meet & Greet" and "6:30-8:00pm - Presentation". It also lists the location: "Stephenson County Farm Bureau, 210 W. Spring St., Freeport IL, 61032". On the right side, under "COMMUNITY PARTNERS", are logos for "GREATER FREEPORT PARTNERSHIP", "UNITED WAY Northwest Illinois", and "Healing Illinois".

We envision a community where everyone deserves access to safe, stable, & affordable housing.

Let's Discuss Our Communities

- Shortage of Affordable Housing
- Blighted Homes
- Code Violations
- Ignored Resident Concerns
- AND MORE!!

Let Your Voice Be Heard!

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May 1, 2025

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Stephenson County Farm Bureau
210 W. Spring St.
Freeport IL, 61032

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

GREATER FREEPORT PARTNERSHIP

UNITED WAY Northwest Illinois

Healing Illinois

Pretzel Fest is this Saturday!

We previewed the many events associated with this year's Pretzel Fest last week, but here are a few reminders on ways to enjoy all of the festivities this Saturday, April 26th.

At 10:00 a.m., gather at the Freeport Arts Museum Plaza across from the Freeport Public Library as Freeport attempts to create the "Largest Pretzel Image Created by Humans" and make history for Pretzel City, USA.

Continue the fun after the human pretzel event with the Pretzel Fest annual celebration from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. throughout downtown Freeport with pretzel-themed vendors, talented entertainers, and many family-friendly activities.

Then from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., celebrate Freeport's German heritage and dance the day away at the inaugural Pretzel City Polka Fest with the best polka band in the Midwest, the Zweifel Brothers at the Freeport Masonic Temple. A cash bar will be available with special German-inspired selections from Lena Brewing Company and sausages, pretzels, and German-fare food from The Traveling Chef. Tickets are \$10 per person or \$15 per couple and can be purchased at the door or online at www.eventbrite.com by searching on "pretzel city polka fest."

After polka it's time for punk with the final show of the pretzel-packed day at the Winneshiek Playhouse where Winnie Rock City multiple punk bands will perform, including The Lobbin Robbins, Polka Punk Sensation from Chicago, Dead Freddie, Flaccid Pickle, and Hot Lemon. A satellite bar will be available and tickets are just \$10 for all ages, available at the door or at Mort's in downtown Freeport prior to the event. Proceeds from the evening support the Winneshiek Playhouse.

For additional information and updates on all Pretzel Day activities, visit greaterfreeport.com/pretzelfast or contact the Greater Freeport Partnership at 815-233-1350.



The week ahead...

As we look ahead, here are a few reminders for the coming week. You can begin with the Arbor Day Celebration at Krape Park tomorrow, Friday April 25th from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. where the public is invited to help plant trees and celebrate the spirit of community and conservation. Then tomorrow night is Highland Community College's free Big Band Concert at 7:00 p.m. at the Ferguson Fine Arts Center on campus. We also want to remind you that this Saturday is also the Salvation Army's Family Night beginning at 5:00 p.m. at the Salvation Army location at 106 West Exchange Street, with free dinner and a movie for families and individuals, as well as spring and summer clothing giveaway.

This week's group working the Cub Food Brat Stand tomorrow and Saturday is the Pearl City American Legion so be sure to stop by from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. both days to enjoy delicious brats, burgers, hot dogs and rib eye sandwiches in support of their fundraising efforts. We're also looking forward to Pretzel City Wine Fest coming up on Saturday, May 10th and we'll share more about that next week.

If you are looking for something to do this week or any week, visit the Greater Freeport Partnership website at www.greaterfreeport.com and click on "weekly events" for a comprehensive listing of many more entertainment and dining events and activities throughout Stephenson County. You can subscribe to their free weekly newsletter there too, and we have a link to a QR code in the print version of this newscast if you'd like to sign up that way.



While you're signing up for more of what's going on in our community, you can also subscribe to the City of Freeport's monthly newsletter at their website, www.cityoffreeport.org, or by using their QR code that appears below.

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In closing...

In closing, if you haven't already done so be sure to listen to this week's in-depth interview where FREEPOD host Alan Wenzel visited with another FREEPOD host, Tim Connors, about this Saturday's Polka Fest.

Next week, our next in-depth interview once again features Alan speaking with Andrea Schultz-Winter and Nicole Haas of the Greater Freeport Partnership about business development and other community events in Freeport. Their conversation will post at noon on Tuesday, April 29th and be available for you to listen to then or at any time after that – just head to our website or your favorite podcast platform and search on FREEPOD to select the programs of your choice.

As always, we remind you that FREEPOD couldn't come to you without the Mass Communication Department at Highland Community College and our community liaisons and reporters. We're also grateful to WNIJ for partnering with us in reaching even more listeners, including Spanish-speaking community members. Thank you, Team FREEPOD! For more info, including how to make a tax-deductible contribution to support our work, visit our website at www.freepod.org.

And with that, time's up for this week. Tune in again next Thursday at noon for more about what's happening in Freeport, and be sure to subscribe to us on your favorite podcast platform to receive alerts as each new pod airs. You can also always click through to our pods through our Facebook page or the website of our partner, WNIJ National Public Radio in DeKalb, at www.northernpublicradio.org. Thank you for listening to FREEPOD!

Listen next week for more about what's happening in the Freeport area!