



**20 February
2025**

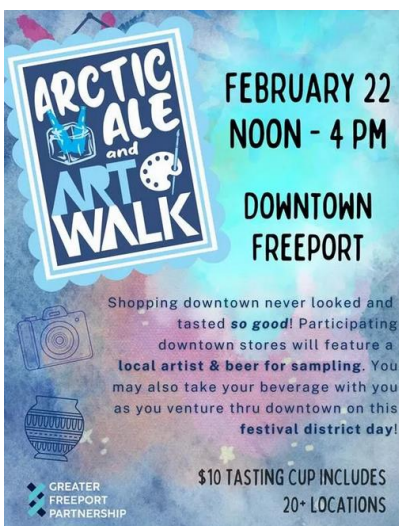
Welcome to FREEROD, a local news source for everyone in the Freeport area. This weekly podcast is brought to you by a large volunteer group dedicated to providing to objective, unbiased updates on what's happening in our community.

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!

Arctic Ale and Art Walk

This Saturday, February 22nd, the Greater Freeport Partnership, hosts the sixth annual Arctic Ale and Art Walk from noon to 4 pm. More than 15 participating businesses will feature local artists and offer a chance to taste a favorite ale. Tasting cups will be available for \$10 along with event wristbands that can be purchased the day of the event at the Partnership office at 110 West Main Street.

Artists and artisans in local shops will showcase their talents, with opportunities to purchase their work and take home something special for your collection. Artists' media include paintings, photography, pottery, fiber arts, jewelry, and more. Some artists will offer hands-on activities.



As the first Freeport Festival District date of the year, patrons can extend their downtown enjoyment when purchasing a beverage, whether as part of the event or otherwise, that they can carry throughout downtown, enjoying attractions, shopping, and dining from 11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.

A list of participating locations and additional event information can be found at greaterfreeport.com/arctical or by downloading the Greater Freeport Partnership mobile app.

Early voting for Spring elections

Believe it or not, it is already time for early voting to begin for the April City elections. Starting today, February 20th, voters can cast their ballots for all city and village races in the lower level of the Stewart Centre, 50 West Douglas Street in Freeport from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Early voting will continue until election day on April 1st. Voters are reminded if they vote early at the Stewart Centre, they cannot also go to their polling place on April 1st and cast a ballot there too. Election questions can be directed to the County Clerk's office at 815-235-8289.

Jo-Ann store closure

Freeport's Jo-Ann craft and fabric store will be closing as part of the company's ongoing Chapter 11 bankruptcy process that will result in 500 of its 850 craft and fabric stores closing throughout the country. The store in Sterling will also close.

No date was given for when these closures. FREEPOD will report further information as the process continues.

City to upgrade street lighting, may receive funding for energy efficiency projects

Freeport is on the ComEd Select Communities list that allows 120 of ComEd's 400 communities in Illinois to apply for and receive up to 100% funding of energy efficiency projects within the city. The City is applying for funding to provide improved street lighting in areas of the City by the summer of 2025 and beyond, with plans to target Illinois Department of Transportation corridors and residential areas identified by law enforcement. Each project must be applied for separately.

Separately, the City is also creating a plan to replace all street lights on Police Chief Shenberger's crime area list with higher-wattage fixtures similar to the lighting models installed downtown in 2021. These lighting fixtures will not qualify for help from ComEd as there will be an increase in wattage. Potential project costs for the fixtures are currently estimated at around \$45,000. Funding will be determined after meetings with ComEd in the very near future.

City employee recognition

Freeport recently recognized a number of City employees for their hard work with Employee of the Year Awards.

The City Employee of the Year award was presented to Mark McCullough, an 18-year veteran of the Freeport Fire Department. The Department Head of the Year award was presented to Wayne Duckmann, Director of Community and Economic Development. Doug Quinn, the City's Code Enforcement Supervisor, was named the City Hall Employee of the Year.

The Freeport Police Department's Officer of the Year award was presented to Lieutenant Andrew Good and the Freeport Police Department Civilian Employee of the Year was awarded to Craig Deininger. The

Utility Department Employee of the Year was awarded to Randi Kohlbauer, who serves as the Environmental & Regulatory Compliance Officer, and the Street Department Employee of the Year was awarded to James Goeb.

Additional members of the City Staff were recognized for their many years of service and continued commitment to improving the community and keeping everyone safe including Bradley Cox and Hillary Broshous of the Fire Department and Michelle Richter of the Finance Department.

Freeport High School teacher wins State recognition

The Illinois State Board of Education has recognized Jena Kleindl, who teaches English and journalism at Freeport High School as the State's Outstanding Early Career Educator. This recognition comes as part of the Board's annual Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year Awards that recognize dedication, innovation, and the impact of talented professionals in Illinois schools in seven categories, including classroom teachers, early career educators, school administrators, student support personnel, educational service personnel, community volunteers, and teams.

Kleindl's award goes to an educator who has less than five years of experience and has demonstrated excellence and leadership beyond their years, and makes her a part of the Teacher of the Year Cohort as the only Outstanding Early Career Educator. The cohort also includes Regional Teachers of the Year as well as Bilingual, Special Education, and Early Childhood Teachers of the Year. Those in the cohort with five or more years of teaching experience qualify as finalists for Illinois Teacher of the Year – the state's highest honor for classroom teachers. That award is presented at an event in May.

FREEPOD is delighted to congratulate Jena on this award and we're proud to have been able to work with her on special projects such as the podcast last Spring created entirely by her class. We are looking forward to more of these types of experiences in 2025.

For more on Kleindl's award and others also recognized, visit the Illinois State Board of Education website at www.isbe.net. Congratulations, Jena!

HCC staff recognition

Highland Community College recently honored four outstanding colleagues at its spring semester kickoff with 2024 Opel and Excellence Awards that recognize "above and beyond" work quality, creativity, honesty, integrity, self-development, and excellence.

Madonna Keeny of Winslow, the manager of the college bookstore, received the award for Administrative and Professional Excellence. Jackie Schultz from German Valley, a part-time administrative assistant for Lifelong Learning, received the Part-time Employee Excellence Award. Freeport's Stacey Benkert received the Classified Excellence Award for her work as a student accounts coordinator, and Karla Giuffre, also of Freeport, received the Opel Award in recognition of her work as a biology instructor as well as an active co-advisor and recruiter for Women+ in Science and Student Senate. The Opel Award is named for Don Opel, who helped establish the Highland Community College Foundation. Congratulations, Highland award recipients!

Freeport Park District Names Berin Jackson as Superintendent of Parks and Natural Resources



The Freeport Park District has named Berin Jackson (left) as Superintendent of Parks and Natural Resources. According to Executive Director Bruce Cubberley, Jackson will bring experience in park management, dedication to community engagement, and passion for environmental stewardship to the role, making him well-suited to enhance and expand the City's parks system.

Safe Sitter class at FHN

Next Saturday, March 1st, FHN is hosting the class Safe Sitter Essentials with CPR from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in the lower level of FHN Memorial Hospital in Freeport. The class is designed to prepare students in grades six through eight to be safe when they're home alone or babysitting.

The fee for the full-day course is \$50, which includes the Safe Sitter Essentials Student Handbook, completion card, and basic CPR skill practice, although the class does not qualify for full CPR certification. Financial assistance is available for eligible students; call 815-599-6707 for more information about eligibility. Registration is required so visit fhn.org/safesitter or just click on "events" at www.fhn.org for more information and to register online.

Artist Talk with Judith Meyer

As a reminder, this Saturday, February 22nd, at 1:30 p.m. artist Judith Meyer will share insights into her exhibition, *The Irrepressible Being of Nature*, which opened at the Freeport Art Museum last Friday. At this free presentation at the Museum, Meyer will discuss her creative process, the influences behind her work, and the inspirations she draws from nature, social issues, global events, myths, and her personal beliefs. The exhibit runs through March 15th.

One Night With the King

A large crowd recently gathered in January at Freeport's Winneshiek Playhouse to honor Dr. Martin Luther King at a special multi-media program in anticipation of Black History Month in February.

The event, titled "One Night With the King," blended songs and live readings of King's speeches with video footage of King's orations and marches. Director Nathan Whitehead said the cast did an outstanding job of taking the audience through King's life, from birth to death. Whitehead said: "We had excellent readers, and the footage of the speeches and marches enhanced the production. The photos and videos showed his evolution through life."

The cast consisted of guest vocalist Gwendolyn Sanders as well as Franrances Terry, Bobbie Collins Kates, LaFrancine McGee Baker and Paulette Williams-Thomas. Video director Paul Vehmeier and audio director Cameron Trice worked to seamlessly integrate the production, Whitehead said.

Staging “One Night With the King” realized a long-held dream for Whitehead. “I had this idea and have wanted to do it since the pandemic. It’s great to be able to have produced this tribute five years later. It was a great night,” he said.

Whitehead also is vice president of the Winneshiek Players Board of Directors. He said the board is seeking to stage more free community events like “One Night With the King” to bring people into the theater. The group may host three to four such events this year. The next is slated for early summer. Whitehead said that the board is committed to ensuring that theater is kept alive in the community.

Lindo Theatre to present Oscar nominated films

As they have been able to do in previous years, Classic Cinema’s Lindo Theatre in Freeport is offering a chance, or a second chance for some folks, to view all ten of the films nominated for Best Pictures at this year’s Academy Awards event occurring on March 2nd at two special events over the next two weekends.

The 10 films that are nominated include *The Substance*, *Emilia Pérez*, *Wicked*, *A Complete Unknown*, and *Dune: Part 2*, all of which will air this Saturday, February 22nd, and *Nickel Boys*, *Conclave*, *Anora*, *The Brutalist*, and *I’m Still Here*, all of which will air next Saturday, March 1st.

This year the Lindo is also offering special showings of Short Film nominees. For more information and showtimes visit www.classiccinemas.com and click on the Lindo link under “locations.”

The week ahead...

In looking at the week ahead, don’t forget tonight’s One Book One Freeport presentation at the Freeport Public Library at 6:30 p.m. Aaron Lawler, a professor at Waubensee Community College, will address big questions that many have asked at some point, such as “Who am I?”, “Why am I here?”, and “What does it all mean?” as the presentation examines the intersection of philosophy, poetry, and psychology in the quest for meaning and purpose.

Next Wednesday, February 26th, the Library will host another presentation in the popular Lectures in American History Series at 6:00 p.m. when Kevin Kenney presents *Baseball's Alternate Universe*, *The Negro Leagues*. The discussion will provide an overview of the history of Negro Leagues baseball in America from the 1920s through the 1950s.

We’re also looking forward to the women’s mix n’ mingle event at the Winneshiek Players Theatre on Saturday, March 1st from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. There’ll be lots of fun, networking, and snacks along with some creative activities for a minimum donation of \$10 to support Winneshiek Players’ efforts.

This Saturday is the last of the season for the Stephenson County Winter Farmers Market so be sure to check that out from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Stephenson County Farm Bureau, perhaps as you stroll downtown during the Artic Ale and Art Walk. And there’s still one more day to register for the Freeport Park District’s *Mom & Me Masquerade Ball* for Moms and their young gents aged 10 or younger. The event will be held next Friday, February 28th from 6:00 to 8:30 p.m. and registration must

be completed by end of the day tomorrow, Friday, February 21st. Call 815-235-6114 or go online at <https://bit.ly/candylandballmomandmemasquerade>

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.



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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 that aired on Tuesday featuring FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Tim Connors visiting with Rachel Gastel about overcoming alcohol-related challenges.

Next week, tune in as FREEPOD host Alan Wenzel chats with Zoey Huspen of the CUB Citizens Utility Board about the workshop in Freeport coming up on March 6th that will offer ways to save on utility bills. Their conversation will post at noon on Tuesday, February 25th.

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 on your as each new pod airs. You can also always click through to our pods through our Facebook page or the website of our National Public Radio partner, WNIJ in DeKalb, at www.northernpublicradio.org.

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.

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