FREEPOD | PRINT EDITION

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Coming up on the October 22nd, 2026 edition of Freepod, Freeport Police address concerns about a possible weapon at the middle school, and Jo Daviess County establishes new guidelines for large-scale data centers.

Plus, a new initiative aims to keep billions of dollars in generational wealth right here in Northwest Illinois, and a familiar Freeport community leader receives statewide recognition.

We'll also have details on a major utility rate settlement, new funding opportunities for local artists, and Halloween celebrations across the region.

This is Freepod: the news you've been missing.

FREEPORT POLICE RESPOND TO RUMORS OF WEAPON AT MIDDLE SCHOOL

Freeport Police and School District officials are reassuring families that there is no ongoing threat to students following reports of a possible weapon at Freeport Middle School.

The incident occurred Thursday, October 15, when students alerted school administrators that another student might have a weapon.

Administrators immediately located the student and contacted the school's resource officer.

Freeport Police responded and determined that the object was actually the lower frame of a paintball gun.

Police say the component was incapable of firing and could not be used as part of an actual firearm.

No functional weapon was recovered, and no students or staff members were injured.

School District 145 says the student's conduct was addressed through the district's administrative procedures.

In a statement, district officials praised the students who reported their concerns, saying their quick actions allowed administrators to respond immediately.

Police also addressed misinformation circulating about the incident, encouraging residents to rely on verified information rather than sharing unconfirmed claims that could create unnecessary fear.

District officials emphasized that student and staff safety remains their highest priority and confirmed there is no continuing threat to the school.

JO DAVIESS COUNTY BOARD ESTABLISHES POLICY ON LARGE-SCALE DATA CENTERS



The Jo Daviess County Board has established a new policy outlining how it will evaluate proposals for large-scale data centers, emphasizing protection of taxpayers, natural resources, and existing infrastructure.

The policy, announced October 15, comes as communities across Northwest Illinois consider the potential economic benefits and environmental consequences of data center development.

Under the policy, developers must demonstrate that their projects can obtain adequate electricity without increasing costs for existing customers or county taxpayers.

Proposals must also address water consumption, groundwater protection, wastewater management, noise, air quality, and impacts on agricultural land.

The county says it will not offer financial incentives that create additional costs or unfunded obligations for taxpayers.

Developers would also be responsible, to the extent permitted by law, for infrastructure improvements needed to support their facilities, including roads, electrical systems, and water utilities.

The board is also requiring a transparent public review process supported by environmental, financial, and technical analysis.

County officials say they support responsible economic development, but projects must demonstrate long-term benefits without shifting financial risks to residents.

The policy establishes evaluation standards rather than an outright ban on data centers.

FNWIL ANNOUNCES CREATION OF RURAL VITALITY COALITION

Nearly three billion dollars in generational wealth is expected to change hands across Northwest Illinois over the next decade, and a local foundation wants to keep more of that money in the region.

The Foundation for Northwest Illinois has launched the Rural Vitality Coalition, establishing permanent community funds

throughout Stephenson, Jo Daviess, and Carroll counties.

The foundation estimates that two-point-nine-two billion dollars will be transferred through inheritance over the next ten years, with much of that money potentially leaving the region.

Under the new initiative, communities that raise 25-thousand dollars will receive an equal matching contribution from the foundation, creating a 50-thousand-dollar endowment.

Investment earnings will support local nonprofits and community projects for generations.

The initiative includes communities such as Freeport, Galena, Stockton, Savanna, and Mount Carroll.

More information is available through the Foundation for Northwest Illinois.

FREEPORT ART MUSEUM OFFERS GRANTS FOR LOCAL ARTISTS

Artists and cultural organizations across Northwest Illinois have an opportunity to receive funding for upcoming projects.

The Freeport Art Museum has received a 20-thousand-dollar grant from the Illinois Arts Council to support creative and cultural programming throughout the region.

Through the Regional Arts Partners program, individual artists and organizations can apply for grants of up to two thousand dollars.

Funding is available in six counties: Stephenson, Jo Daviess, Carroll, Ogle, Lee, and Whiteside.

The program supports projects that expand public access to the arts, encourage community participation, and provide opportunities for local artists.

Both emerging and established artists are encouraged to apply, along with organizations offering cultural programming.

Eligible projects must take place between January and August of 2027.

The application deadline is Friday, December 11th.

More information, including eligibility requirements and application instructions, is available on the Freeport Art Museum's website at freeportartmuseum.com, under the For Artists section.

LUECKE'S CELEBRATES 105 YEARS



A longtime downtown Freeport business is celebrating more than a century of serving the community.

Luecke's Jewelry Store is marking its 105th anniversary, a milestone that reflects generations of local business history.

Founded in 1921, Luecke's has remained a familiar part of Freeport's downtown business district through decades of economic changes and evolving shopping habits.

The store recently hosted a celebration called Luecke's Fest, inviting residents and visitors to join the festivities in the streets of downtown Freeport.

City officials publicly congratulated the business, thanking Luecke's for its longstanding commitment to the community.

The anniversary highlights the importance of locally owned businesses to Freeport's history and downtown identity.

And after 105 years, Luecke's Jewelry continues to be part of the city's retail tradition.

PAT NORMAN HONORED BY ILLINOIS BOYS & GIRLS CLUB



A longtime Freeport educator and community leader has received statewide recognition for her decades of service to young people.

Pat Norman was inducted into the Boys and Girls Club Illinois Hall of Fame on October first, becoming the first person from Freeport and Stephenson County to receive the honor.

Norman was one of just four inductees statewide this year.

She's served on the local Boys and Girls Club board for sixteen years and currently serves as its secretary.

Norman also made history as the first woman and first African American to serve as principal of Freeport High School, a position she held for seven years before spending thirteen years as the district's Human Resources Director.

Her community involvement includes leadership positions with the Freeport NAACP, Norman C. Sleezer Youth Home, and League of Women Voters.

Earlier this year, she also received the Jane Addams Legacy Award from the Foundation for Northwest Illinois.

In the interest of transparency, Norman is also a member of the Freepod Board of Directors and serves as a presenter for Freepod.

From all of us here at Freepod: congratulations, Pat, on your incredibly well-deserved honor.

NICOR GAS RATE LAWSUIT SETTLEMENT APPROVED

Nicor Gas customers across Northwest Illinois will see a smaller rate increase than originally proposed, following a settlement approved by state regulators.

The Illinois Commerce Commission approved the agreement October 15, reducing Nicor's proposed 221-million-dollar rate hike by 63 percent.

The settlement, negotiated by Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul, cuts the increase to approximately 82 million dollars.

For the average customer, that means an estimated monthly increase of two dollars and 21 cents, instead of six dollars.

The agreement also reduces Nicor's fixed monthly customer charge from 21 dollars and 30 cents to 15 dollars, beginning November 16th.

Consumer watchdog Citizens Utility Board supported the settlement but says the utility's rates remain too high.

CUB notes that Nicor's delivery charges have increased approximately 150 percent since 2017.

The settlement also reduces the company's authorized shareholder profit rate and requires greater consideration of alternatives to costly pipeline replacements.

MUSIC AT THE MUSEUM IN SAVANNA



The Savanna Museum and Cultural Center is wrapping up its 2026 Music at the Museum concert series with a Halloween-themed celebration.

The season finale takes place Friday, October 23, beginning at seven-thirty in the evening.

The featured performers are Ukulele Express 815, a five-member ukulele and vocal group from Freeport that's been entertaining audiences since 2021.

The group performs familiar favorites spanning several decades and musical genres.

The musicians will appear in Halloween costumes, and audience members are encouraged to dress up as well.

The evening includes a costume contest with prizes and a grand-prize drawing for concertgoers who've attended throughout the season.

The concert takes place in the museum's Community Room at 406 Main Street in downtown Savanna.

A ten-dollar donation is suggested.

HCC FALL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC CONCERT

And if you enjoy live music, the sounds of the season continue next weekend in Freeport.

Following Friday's Music at the Museum concert in Savanna, Highland Community College is preparing for its annual Fall Instrumental Music Concert.

The performance takes place Friday, October 30, at seven in the evening, in the Ferguson Fine Arts Center on Highland's Freeport campus.

The concert will feature both the Highland Concert Band and Orchestra, bringing together student and community musicians from throughout Northwest Illinois.

Audiences can expect a varied program featuring woodwinds, brass, percussion, and strings.

The concert offers an opportunity to enjoy live instrumental music while supporting local performers and Highland's fine arts programs.

More information is available at highland.edu.

ROCHELLE FUNDRAISER TO BENEFIT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS



A night of bingo in Rochelle will help support two organizations serving vulnerable children and families in Northwest Illinois.

Small Business Bingo takes place Tuesday, November third, from six until eight in the evening at Flight Deck Bar and Grill, located at 1207 West Gurler Road.

The family-friendly fundraiser benefits HOPE of Ogle County, which assists domestic violence survivors, and Shining Star Children's Advocacy Center, which serves children affected by abuse.

Admission is fifteen dollars per person for ten rounds of bingo, with additional raffles featuring prizes donated by local businesses.

Organizer Ashley Patrick of AP Massage Therapy says the goal is to bring the community together while supporting local nonprofits.

All proceeds will benefit the two organizations.

For more information or table reservations, contact Ashley Patrick through Facebook.

MOUNT CARROLL PUMPKIN FEST



Halloween celebrations are taking over Northwest Illinois, with three communities offering a full day of family-friendly festivities on Saturday, October 31.

The fun begins in downtown Mount Carroll, where Pumpkin Fest runs from eight in the morning until one in the afternoon.

The free celebration features pumpkin painting, face painting, dancing witches, inflatable games, and a miniature gourd racing track.

Visitors can also enjoy live music from Marques Morel, food vendors, and a farmers market.

The festivities conclude with the popular ping-pong ball drop.

And if you're looking for something a little less spooky, another Halloween celebration in nearby Ogle County offers just that.

NOT SO SPOOKY HALLOWEEN WALK IN MOUNT MORRIS



For families with younger children, Mount Morris is offering a Halloween celebration that's more fun than frightening.

The Mount Morris Public Library is hosting its Not-So-Spooky Halloween Walk on Saturday, October 31st, from eleven in the morning until two in the afternoon.

Children and their families can follow a Halloween-themed path through the library, decorate their own trick-or-treat bags, and make spooky treats.

The event is designed to give children of all ages a chance to enjoy Halloween without the frightening surprises of traditional haunted attractions.

The library is located at 105 South McKendrie Avenue in Mount Morris.

And for those looking for a much bigger Halloween spectacle, the celebration continues that evening in Galena.

GALENA'S 46TH ANNUAL HALLOWEEN PARADE & FESTIVAL



After a day of Halloween festivities in Mount Carroll and Mount Morris, the celebration moves to Galena for one of Northwest Illinois' biggest Halloween traditions.

Galena's 46th Annual Halloween Parade and Festival takes place Saturday, October 31st, from six-thirty until eight in the evening.

Organized by the Galena Area Chamber of Commerce, the free

event transforms historic Main Street into a Halloween spectacle featuring elaborate floats, marching bands, costumed characters, and plenty of treats.

Thousands of spectators are expected.

With downtown parking limited, shuttle service from the Galena Walmart parking lot begins at three-thirty in the afternoon.

It's a fitting finale to a Halloween filled with celebrations across Northwest Illinois.

TRICK OR TREATING SCHEDULES



If you are staying in, or if you have some little ghouls interested in trick or treating, be sure you're aware of the trick or treating hours for your community.

In Stephenson County, downtown Freeport businesses will offer trick-or-treating Saturday, October 31st, from four until six in the evening. Pearl City has scheduled trick-or-treating from five until seven.

In Ogle County, Oregon's hours are five until eight, while Polo will welcome trick-or-treaters from four until seven. Mount Morris begins at five.

In Carroll County, Savanna has scheduled trick-or-treating from five until seven.

And in Jo Daviess County, Galena will hold trick-or-treating Friday, October 30th, from five until seven, ahead of Saturday's Halloween parade. Scales Mound will also celebrate Friday, from five-thirty until seven-thirty.

Elizabeth and Apple River have scheduled trick-or-treating Saturday from five until seven.

Families should confirm local hours before heading out, and drivers are reminded to slow down and watch for children throughout Halloween weekend.

IN CLOSING

And that brings us to the end of this week's Freepod. Remember, if you prefer reading the news, every story from today's newscast is available in written form at freepod.org. You can catch up on the latest headlines, revisit a story, or share it with someone who might have missed it.

And Freepod is always available on your schedule! New episodes are released every Thursday at noon, but you can listen anytime, wherever you get your podcasts. Whether you're commuting, working around the house, or just taking a break, we're here to help you stay connected to northwest Illinois.

And our interviews are also available any time. This past week, Tim interviewed Katie Gentz and Leslie Mastroianni from the Greater Freeport Partnership. They shared their experience working on the Recast project, a national program that gives local leaders the tools and skills to help promote businesses in their communities.

We'd also like to thank our community liaisons and reporters for helping us bring you the stories that matter, our partners at WNIJ in DeKalb for helping us reach a wider audience, and the Media Studies Department at Highland Community College for producing this program.

And if you believe in the importance of local journalism, there are several ways you can support Freepod. Follow us on Facebook, subscribe to the podcast, and share our stories with your friends and neighbors.

You can also help keep local news accessible to everyone by making a tax-deductible contribution at freepod.org. Every contribution helps us continue covering the people, places, and issues that shape our communities.

We'll be back next week with more news from across northwest Illinois.

This has been Freepod. Thanks for listening!