



**5 September
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 that's 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.

FREEPOD partners with WNIJ

We have big news for FREEPOD!! We're really excited to let you know that FREEPOD is now partnering with WNIJ, the National Public Radio station in DeKalb!

After sharing our episodes and other information with them a few months ago, their station management decided to give us a listen and they liked what they heard, including our non-profit format that is dedicated to providing local news that's as objective, accurate, inclusive, and independent as possible.

Working together with WNIJ, we can expand both organizations' audiences and coverage. You can now find our weekly newscasts by just going to the WNIJ website at www.northernpublicradio.org and clicking on the FREEPOD logo on their homepage. Both audio and print versions are available and will be archived there, and if you click on HOLA on the homepage of their bilingual site, you can also find both audio and print versions translated into Spanish. WNIJ will also promote FREEPOD in their broadcasts and on their social media, and they recommend that you bookmark their pages if you'd like to follow us there. Our Tuesday in-depth interviews will be included very soon too!

The FREEPOD website will continue to be online for your convenience, and will provide additional information as well as links to WNIJ.

Thank you, WNIJ, for this wonderful partnering opportunity!

Lena Fall Festival

The Lena Lions Annual Fall Festival, which has been called "The Cadillac of Small Town Festivals", will be held in downtown Lena this Friday and Saturday, September 6th and 7th.

The Festival is ready for another round of food, music, crafts, and family fun starting this Friday and continuing on Saturday. The action begins Friday night with carnival rides at 6 p.m., live music, and a variety of food options including pork chops on a stick, the Lions' famous ham stand, and other tasty options. Craft vendors will also be selling their wares.

There is a 5K run/walk on Saturday morning at 8:00, for which you can register at the Lena Park District website through Friday, <https://raceroster.com/events/2024/89103/lena-fall-festival>, and then the highlight of the two days is the parade at noon Saturday. After the parade the carnival rides fire up again and local bands will play all day in downtown Lena. Go to the Lena Illinois Lions Facebook Page and the Lena Lions Fall Festival events page for more details!

Football season starts for Freeport Pretzels

The Pretzels lost their opening game Friday night to Boylan, but by only one point with a final score of 14 to 13 in Boylan's favor. However, that was a competitive game compared to the rest of Friday night's NIC-10 games where the next closest game was Harlem to Belvidere with a score of 21 to 10. The other conference games were pretty much blow-outs, so it was an interesting start to the season for the NIC-10 conference.

The Pretzels' next Friday night game is September 13th against Belvidere, who bested Guilford 29 to 0 on Friday. Go, Pretzels!

Library grants

The Illinois Secretary of State and the State Librarian have announced that throughout the 45th Senate District, libraries serving a combined 128,000 people have received nearly a quarter of a million dollars in grants. The grants include annual per capita funding as well as newly created one-time technology grants to help libraries most in need to upgrade their technology infrastructures. The Freeport Public Library is receiving just over \$63,000, the largest grant in the region by quite a large margin, but many other libraries in Stephenson County are also receiving support.

New business locations

The Greater Freeport Partnership announces the opening and relocation of two businesses in Freeport. Ribbon cutting ceremony at the new location for the Freeport Area Church Cooperative Food Pantry at 890 W. Galena Ave., Freeport will be on Friday, September 6th at noon, and Re-Spun Records & Resale at 119 E. Stephenson St. will celebrate their ribbon cutting on Thursday, September 12 at 2 pm. The public is invited to attend these events and visit these businesses in their new locations!

Stephenson County featured in regional publication

"There's a buzz about Stephenson County, and it has nothing to do with this summer's cicadas. It has everything to do with a growing prosperity." That's the opening sentence of a positive overview of

Stephenson County that appeared in the August edition of Northwest Quarterly. Freeport was the primary location featured, including interviews with Michelle DeHaven Quast, CEO of The Foundation for Northwest Illinois; Andrea Schultz Winter, Executive Director of the Greater Freeport Partnership; County Board Chairman Scott Helms; Anne Sadler, broker and owner of Choice Realty; FHN CEO Mark Gridley; Highland Community College Educator Scott Anderson; and Freeport Mayor Jodi Miller with City Manager Rob Boyer.

Boyer highlighted infrastructure improvements including reconstruction of six and a half miles of roadway this year, the new \$60 million wastewater treatment plant that draws from new sources of groundwater and began its multiphase replacement this summer, and \$12 million in forgivable loans from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to replace 2,300 lead water service lines. He also mentioned the 1% sales tax increase passed by the City Council in the Spring to fund future road repairs. This is expected to provide an additional estimated \$3 million per year to update all of Freeport's streets as part of a 25-year program, says Boyer. He was quoted as saying that all this investment shows the city is managing resources appropriately and planning for the future.

New businesses downtown and in The Meadows shopping center, including the soon-to-open Beef-a-Roo, were also examples of growth and success. The article also reviewed home sales, the educational system including Highland, workforce initiatives, healthcare resources, downtown revitalization efforts, and successful community entertainment events.

Lena Village President Steve Buss and Adkins Energy COO Bill Howell were also interviewed. You can find the complete article at the Northwest Quarterly website:

<https://oldnorthwestterritory.northwestquarterly.com/2024/08/19/stephenson-county-builds-momentum/>

FHN nationally recognized for high-quality cardiovascular care

FHN Memorial Hospital has received five American Heart Association Get With The Guidelines® achievement awards for demonstrating commitment to following up-to-date, research-based guidelines for the treatment of heart disease and stroke, ultimately leading to more lives saved, shorter recovery times and fewer readmissions to the hospital.

Every 40 seconds, someone in the U.S. has a stroke or heart attack, and heart disease and stroke are the Number 1 and Number 5 causes of death in the United States, respectively. Get With The Guidelines puts the expertise of the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association to work for hospitals nationwide, helping ensure patient care is aligned with the latest guidelines.

As a participant in Get With The Guidelines programs, FHN Memorial Hospital qualified for the awards by demonstrating how their organization has committed to continuously improving quality care.

According to FHN Stroke Program Coordinator Tracy Love, with a stroke, time lost is brain lost, and this award demonstrates FHN's commitment to ensuring patients in our community receive care based on nationally recognized clinical guidelines."

FHN Cardiology Clinical Nurse Leader Laura Mack says the program results in better patient health by helping to track and measure performance in providing quality cardiac care that leads to better patient outcomes.

You can read more about the Guidelines and FHN cardiovascular services at www.fhn.org.

Midwest region gas prices fall

As of August 31st, regional gas prices reached an average of \$3.21 per gallon of regular fuel on Monday, down from the previous week's price of \$3.32 per gallon, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. The average fuel price in the Midwest region has fallen about 27 cents since July. A year ago, the average gas price in the Midwest region was 12% higher at \$3.64 per gallon.

In Freeport, prices for regular gas at regional and nationally branded gas stations dropped 20 cents in the past two weeks from \$3.79 per gallon to \$3.59. The Marathon station across from Lincoln Mall has usually been lower and earlier this week regular gas was priced at \$3.49 per gallon.

Unemployment claims decrease

The U.S. Department of Labor said that initial filings for unemployment benefits in Illinois have dropped. New jobless claims, a measure for layoffs, fell to just under 8,000 in the week ending August 24th, down from almost 8,200 the week before. Nationwide, U.S. unemployment claims dropped to 231,000 last week, down 2,000 claims from 233,000 the week prior on a seasonally adjusted basis.

Unemployment claims can be either seasonally adjusted or not seasonally adjusted. Seasonally adjusted data averages in the types of changes that normally occur at the same times and in about the same magnitude every year – such as seasonal adjustments, holidays, sales, and model changeovers – and takes longer to produce since these changes occur over months.

Data that is not seasonally adjusted can be acquired more frequently, often weekly. For Stephenson County, the not seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 5.7% as of July, compared to a national rate of 4.5% and an Illinois statewide rate of 6.2%. This information is available from the U.S. Department of Labor's weekly reports.

DeHaven Quest appointed to Governor's Commission

To better inform policymakers on the root causes of poverty and economic insecurity in northwest Illinois, CEO Michelle DeHaven Quast of The Foundation for Northwest Illinois has been appointed to the Governor's Commission on Poverty and Economic Stability by Illinois House Minority Leader Tony McCombie.

The Commission is made up of 25 members consisting of four members of the State General Assembly, one member of the judiciary, and twenty public leaders who represent key constituencies impacted by poverty. The commission was created to address root causes of economic insecurity, racial disparities, and other contributing social, economic, and cultural factors.

“The overall purpose of the Illinois Commission on Poverty Elimination and Economic Security is not unlike the goals and interests of The Foundation for Northwest Illinois,” stated DeHaven Quast. The Five-Year Strategy to Reduce Deep and Persistent Poverty can be found online at www.ilga.gov/reports/ReportsSubmitted/3334RSGAEmail6536RSGAAttachPoverty%20Commission%20Strategic%20Plan%20Brief%202022%20FINAL.pdf

COVID vaccines are here

The updated mRNA COVID vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer are now available and are free of charge under most health insurance policies. The new vaccines are based on the KP.2 strain, one of the variants that have caused the majority of infections during this summer’s COVID wave.

According to the CDC everyone, especially older adults and those with weakened immune systems or other health issues, should get the new vaccine. Although children six months and older should probably also get the vaccine, parents should check with their pediatrician to see what is recommended for their child.

According to the CDC, “If you’ve had COVID this summer, you’ll have strong infection-based immunity and can wait a few months after your infection before getting the vaccine. You can wait three months since your symptoms began or, for asymptomatic cases, since you first tested positive.”

Remember that the COVID and flu vaccines are not live virus vaccines so you cannot get the disease from the vaccine.

West Nile Virus

In other health news, you may know that Dr. Anthony Fauci was recently hospitalized with, and subsequently recovered from, complications from an infection with West Nile Virus. What you may not know is that late August and September is prime season for this disease. This may seem counterintuitive since mosquitoes are often more associated with hotter summer months, which makes it important to pay attention to what’s happening now when it comes to West Nile Virus.

In 2001, Illinois had the most cases of human, horse, and bird cases of West Nile Virus in the entire country. Since then, it has been endemic in the upper Midwest, meaning that we can always expect mosquitoes to spread it from birds to humans, usually beginning in late summer. So far in Illinois this season, there have been nine human cases, 29 cases in birds, one in a horse, and over 2000 positive mosquito batches. So far, Stephenson County has reported two bird cases and two mosquito traps that tested positive and Winnebago County has reported one human case. So West Nile Virus is around!

Although there is no vaccine and symptoms are generally mild and flu-like, some individuals can develop encephalitis, marked by a rapid onset of a high fever with head and body aches, disorientation, tremors, convulsions and, in the most severe cases, even paralysis or death.

There are the three “Rs” in dealing with mosquitos: reduce mosquito habitat, which is primarily standing water; repel them by using DEET and other insect repellents; and report areas that may be harboring mosquitoes to the health department, which can take appropriate actions.

Popular Stephenson County Farm Bureau fundraiser ends

The Prep, Freeze, Cook Fundraiser for Ag In The Classroom fundraiser conducted by the Stephenson County Farm Bureau won't happen this Fall as the organization that prepared the freezer meals is no longer in business. The funds raised in previous years helped the Agriculture in the Classroom Program teach nearly 8,000 Stephenson County students about agriculture.

If you would like to support the Agriculture in the Classroom program by becoming 2024-2025 program sponsor, donations can be sent to the Stephenson County Farm Bureau at 210 West Spring Street in Freeport. Checks can be made out to Stephenson County Farm Bureau Foundation.

PAWS for Reading

This Saturday, just like the second Saturday of every month, therapy dogs will be at the Freeport Public Library – and they are just waiting for stories to be read to them! PAWS FOR READING is the Library's therapy dog program where certified therapy dogs listen to any and all kinds of books that young readers might like to share with them.

This event will occur from 11:00 a.m. to noon on Saturday, and we hope there will be plenty of readers to entertain the furry listeners who will be waiting for them!

Movie in the Park

This Friday, September 6th, the Freeport Park District is hosting a free movie...outdoors at Krape Park! The featured movie is *IF*, which was in theatres just this spring and boasts a star-studded cast including Ryan Reynolds, Cailey Fleming, John Krasinski, Fiona Shaw, Steve Carell, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, and Louis Gossett Jr. The movie is rated PG and is about a young girl who goes through a difficult experience and then begins to see everyone's imaginary friends who have been left behind as their real-life friends have grown up.

The showing will begin at dusk at the Koenig Amphitheatre, also known as the Krape Park band shell, but attendees are welcomed beginning at 7:00. In case of bad weather, check the Park District website at <https://freeportparkdistrict.org/> for updates.

Bring your snacks, lawn chairs, bug spray, and blankets for an evening of family fun at Krape Park!

The week ahead...

As we look at the week ahead, even though it's in Rockford and has already received a lot of press, we wanted to mention the opening of the Hard Rock Casino in Rockford as it's a substantial news story for the whole region. The 180,000-square-foot casino resort has nearly 1,300 slot machines and 44 table games including six-table rooms dedicated to baccarat and poker. The auditorium for live performances, which can be converted into a banquet hall, can seat up to 2,000 and there are six restaurants. And then there's that giant guitar at the casino entrance. It's a replica of the checkerboard

Hamer Standard used by Rockford legend and Cheap Trick Hall of Fame guitarist Rick Nielsen...and stands over 62 feet high. Sounds like this is something a lot of us will be looking forward to visiting!

We also want to let you know about two great events coming up soon in Freeport. First up on Saturday, September 21st, is the Northwest Illinois Air Show at Albertus Airport. Aerobatics, daring barnstorming flights, and war planes are just part of the fun, which also includes live musical performances and a food court. Then on Saturday September 28th it's the Pretzel City Brewfest! Voted the best brew fest in Illinois in 2022, over 150 different brew flavors will be available for tasting. We'll have lots more on both of these events in the next couple of newscasts...and maybe some special interviews too.

For more information on many more fun events and activities throughout Stephenson County, visit the Greater Freeport Partnership website at www.greaterfreeport.com and click on "weekly events."

Until next week

In closing, we're pleased to share that next week's Tuesday In-Depth Interview will be FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Becky Connors talking with Dr. Rocio del Castillo, Assistant Superintendent of Bilingual Education for Freeport School District 145 about bilingual instruction throughout the District. This conversation will post at noon on Tuesday, September 10th.

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!

If you have story suggestions or would like to make a tax-deductible contribution to support FREEPOD, visit our website at www.freepod.org.

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