



**18 September
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.freerod.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. Now let's see what's happening.

Sculpture Walk opens in downtown Freeport

This Friday, September 19th the Freeport Art Museum will officially open the new Sculpture Walk in downtown Freeport. Featuring seven new sculptures throughout the downtown, the Sculpture Walk is a collaboration between the Freeport Art Museum and the Arts and Culture Commission with the City of Freeport and does not use any tax dollars. The not-for-profit Freeport Art Museum is the organization to thank for the Sculpture Walk as well as the downtown Arts Plaza, which contains a splash pad water feature, the Ferguson Pavilion and stage, and the large red Gateway sculpture.

The not-for-profit Freeport Art Museum was able to secure the donated artwork from two local artists, as well as individuals from Missouri, Iowa, Wisconsin, Maryland, and New York. The new pieces of art will stand along Chicago Avenue for an entire year and then be available for purchase.

The Sculpture Walk begins with an opening reception at the Freeport Public Library tomorrow from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. Everyone is welcome and visitors can access a free audio tour by scanning QR codes found at each sculpture. Jessica Modica, Executive Director of the Freeport Art Museum said that the Walk is a dynamic extension of the museum's mission to create experiences that spark imagination and engagement in the arts.

Demolitions scheduled

The City has received a reimbursable Brownfield grant award of nearly \$1.7 Million to demolish the buildings at 17 and 19 West Main Street in downtown Freeport. Both buildings have debilitating roof and water issues that make them unrepairable. Formerly the location of a dry-cleaning business, the

buildings also have confirmed contamination that needs to be addressed as part of the demolition process. Fischer's Excavating was the successful bidder for the project at \$1.1 million.

The City is also in the process of demolishing 17 dangerous properties on East Stephenson Street, South Carroll Street, East Pleasant Street, and several other areas.

Bridge construction on Route 73

Construction has begun on the Illinois Route 73 bridge over Yellow Creek just south of U.S. 20 near Lena. The project includes repairing the bridge deck and replacing bridge joints. One lane will remain open with temporary signals controlling traffic. Completion is expected by the end of November.

Presentation on immigration law

The League of Women Voters of Freeport will host a presentation by Sara Dady, a well-known immigration attorney from Rockford, next Tuesday, September 23rd at 6:30 pm at the Freeport Public Library. Dady is a very experienced attorney with a passion for her work. All are welcome to the program on this important topic of our time.

Brewfest is next weekend!

Next Saturday, September 27th, bring your friends and enjoy the best beer-tasting event in the region! Sample beers direct from the breweries of the area while you also enjoy taste treats from a number of food trucks as well as competitive games.

\$40 general admission tickets include entry, 20 tasting tickets, and a souvenir glass. There are also a limited number of \$75 VIP passes include entry an hour early, 30 tasting tickets, access to special releases and the VIP lounge, a Brewfest t-shirt, VIP souvenir glass, and swag bag.



Tickets can be purchased in advance online by searching on "events" at www.greaterfreeport.com. Tickets will also be available at the gate for \$40 for general admission and designated-driver tickets can also be purchased the day of the event for \$10 but VIP tickets will not available. This is a rain-or-shine event that is open to those 21 and older.

Fall exhibit at The Highland Gallery

The Highland Gallery at Highland Community College will showcase their first exhibit of the Fall 2025 semester which will feature selected work by previous students from the past 15 years. The exhibit is now open and runs through Monday, October 6th in the Ferguson Fine Arts Center at the college. The Highland Gallery is free and open to the public.

Highland Lifelong Learning program

In other Highland news, the Lifelong Learning program at Highland Community College is offering a wide variety of both returning and new classes this Fall that are designed to inspire curiosity, creativity, and connection. Whether you want to explore history, expand your creative skills, or dive into the latest technology, there's something for everyone. Check out the fall course catalog at www.highland.edu by searching on "lifelong" or call 815-599-3403 for more information. That's 815-599-3403.

YMCA Blood Drive



In partnership with Rock River Valley Blood Center, the Family YMCA of Northwest Illinois is hosting a blood drive next Tuesday, September 23rd from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Y.

Reserve a spot today at the URL here <https://rrvbc-donor.degree37.io/schedule-donation> or by calling 815-965-8751. That's 815-965-8751.

Family Enrichment Program family playgroup event

Join the Family Enrichment Program for a family playgroup next Wednesday, September 24th from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. at Krape Park in Freeport. The event will be held at the Koenig Shelter near the band stand and include activities for babies, sensory exploration, an interactive version of The Very Hungry Caterpillar, fishing games, and much more. Activities are focused for children from newborns to three years of age but the whole family is invited and the public event is open to all families with children in

this age range. Register through the QR code at the Family Enrichment Program page on Facebook or call 815-599-1408. That's 815-599-1408.

The Regional Office of Education #8 encompasses Stephenson, Carroll, and Jo Daviess Counties and partners with parents to give their children the best possible start. It is a free personal visiting program for families with children birth to age three and also provides prenatal services.



Big O's On The Hollow to be featured on America's Best Restaurants

Big O's On The Hollow just east of Freeport recently welcomed America's Best Restaurants to its dining room to highlight its popular menu items dishes and feature an interview with owner Kevin O'Brien about the restaurant's role in the community. The restaurant serves as the location for a wide variety of community events, including a number of fundraisers.

O'Brien, who worked for Applebee's for many years, opened the restaurant with his parents, Patrick and Doreen in 2018 and named it for his grandfather who was known as "Big O." The episode will air later on social media platforms. Congratulations, Big O's!

Strategic planning underway at FSD 145

Freeport School District 145 is beginning a new strategic plan that will begin to be implemented in 2026 and will be looking for community input during the process. According to the district, the new three-year plan will shape the future of education in the district with a strong focus on student success.

Priorities include improving educational outcomes by enhancing student performance, enhancing community engagement through stakeholder input and participation, optimizing resources while supporting high standards, and long-term sustainability for the district academically and financially.

The process will incorporate feedback from parents, students, staff and the community. You can provide input now on the website at www.fsd.org and more info will be posted there when available.

Lena Memorial receives final touches

The Northwest Illinois Aerial Combat Memorial in downtown Lena, which features a donated F-4 Phantom fighter jet, has received its final touches! The memorial, which honors war veterans, is located across from the American Legion Hall and includes plans for flags, benches, and pavers to provide a historical lesson for the community and attract tourists.

The memorial is also referred to as the F4 Jet Memorial and is a testament of the community's commitment to years of work that involved years of planning and preparation including acquiring the jet, transporting and refurbishing it, and raising funds. Thank you to the F4 committee and volunteers for their hard work in bringing this project and memorial to life!

Choose your apple!

Victoria Hansen, manager at the Stephenson County Farm Bureau, took a moment to remind us of the great apple varieties we can find at apple orchards in our area. While there are nearly 100 varieties of apples grown in the United States, only a few account for more than 90 percent of apple production. Top favorites include:

- Gala, which is a crispy, juicy, and very sweet apple ideal for snacking;
- Red Delicious, which are sweet and best enjoyed fresh or on salads;
- Fuji, which are also sweet and firm, and perfect for eating fresh;
- Golden Delicious, which have a mild, buttery-honey taste perfect for pies and crisps;
- Crisp, tart, green Granny Smiths;
- and Honey Crisps that are crisp and as sweet as their name implies and great choices for snacking, salads, or apple sauce.

As our local apple orchards open for the season, please support them and enjoy your delicious Fall favorites or find new ones!

The week ahead...

As we look at the week ahead, we hope you'll consider the Youth Aviation event on Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Albertus Airport.

Every year, the Freeport Pilots Association hosts a fun day to introduce youth to the idea of careers in aviation with free plane rides for kids ages 8 through 17. You can register online at www.eaachapters.org or call 815-232-1078 for more information. That's 815-232-1078 and of course there will also be plenty of fun for adult attendees.

EAA'S
YOUNG EAGLES™

Albertus Airport

FREE
Plane Rides
for Kids ages 8-17



YOUTH
AVIATION
PROGRAM

Limited Space Available

Register online eaachapters.org

9am to 1pm

Saturday, September 20th



This event is solely sponsored by the Freeport Pilots Association/EAA Chapter 475
Questions, contact Angie 815-232-1078



Also beginning at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday you can beautify your home for Fall and support the annual mums and pumpkins sale at the Friends Forever Humane Society south of town where all proceeds benefit the Shelter.



If you're hungry tomorrow or Saturday, the Cub Foods Brat Stand this weekend will be run by supporters of the Freeport Elks Lodge 617. They'll be there both Friday and Saturday from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. to serve up brats, burgers, hot dogs, and ribeye sandwiches.

As always, don't forget the Farmers Markets tomorrow morning both in downtown Freeport and near Higher Grounds on the south edge of the City, as well as in Lena (<https://www.stephensoncountyfarmersmarket.com/vendors>).

We also wanted to report on the success of the recent Eats & Beats event resulted in being able to distribute over \$20,000 to local Freeport nonprofit groups, representing a 25% increase over last year's success. FREEPOD featured this event in a previous interview and episode and we add our thanks to everyone who attended. Be sure to invite your friends to join you at the next event in 2026.

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 also subscribe to the City of Freeport's monthly newsletter at their website, www.cityoffreeport.org. We have links to both in the print version of FREEPOD episodes.

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 interviews Jessica Modica, Executive Director of the Freeport Art Museum, about the Sculpture Walk being installed in downtown Freeport that we highlighted earlier in this episode. The interview is available online and can be listened to anytime.

Next Tuesday, FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Tim Connors visits with Kurt Steffen, Cub Foods store manager about how it takes a village to make a supermarket great. This pod will post at noon on Tuesday, September 23rd and be available to listen to then or at any time after that – just head to our website or your favorite podcast platform to select the programs of your choice.

And before we close, we need to ask a favor! When you're listening on your favorite podcast platform, please "like" or "follow" us – this helps us to move up in the rankings of podcasts and enables us to better promote ourselves throughout the region. On Facebook, also please click on "like" as the algorithms there also depend on user input to help us increase our presence.

As always, FREEPOD couldn't come to you without the Mass Communication Department at Highland Community College and our community liaisons and reporters. Thank you, Team FREEPOD! You can always find us on our Facebook page or the website of our National Public Radio partner, WNIJ in DeKalb, at www.northernpublicradio.org. For more info, including how to make a tax-deductible contribution to support our work, visit our website at www.freepod.org.

With that, time's up for this week. Tune in again next Thursday at noon – or any time after that on our website or your favorite podcast platform – for more about what's happening in Freeport, and thank you for listening!

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

LINKS TO OTHER COMMUNITY EVENTS NEWSLETTERS BELOW



What's Going on in Stephenson County?

Subscribe to our weekly event guide!



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