



FREEPOD

The news you've been missing.

Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Pat Norman...

And I'm Paulette Williams-Thomas...

In this week's episode, the Freeport City Council votes to not renew its current agreement with the Greater Freeport Partnership...

A regional theater needs your support...

And Galena gets ready to celebrate its 200th birthday.

This is Freepod for August 20th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

CITY COUNCIL VOTES TO NOT RENEW AGREEMENT WITH GFP

The Greater Freeport Partnership might be seeking new funding sources starting in 2027. On Monday, August 17th, the Freeport City Council voted unanimously to not approve an automatic renewal of their current agreement with the GFP that would give the Partnership another \$400,000 for 2027.

This move does not indicate that the city will offer no funding to the GFP, but rather that the city is not certain it can sustain its current level of funding.

According to city officials, the city's primary sources for funds going to GFP have come from TIF districts, tourism funds, and other city budgets. However, the non-renewal of the TIF district on Lamm Road will lead to a \$180,000 shortfall of funding that had previously been used to fund GFP; that's nearly 50% of the previous allocation.

The current agreement, which was signed in 2024, runs through December 31st of this year. Which gives city leadership and the Greater Freeport Partnership about 4 months to work out a new agreement that more adequately reflects the city's available funds.



FREEPORT PD TO INCREASE ENFORCEMENT DURING LABOR DAY WEEKEND

Freeport Police are stepping up traffic enforcement ahead of the Labor Day holiday.

The department is joining more than 200 law enforcement agencies across Illinois for the statewide "Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over," "Drive High. Get a DUI," and "Click It or Ticket" campaigns.

From August 14th through the early morning hours of September 8th, Freeport offi-

cers will focus on impaired driving, seat belt violations and other dangerous driving behaviors.

Police say that includes drivers impaired by cannabis or other drugs—not just alcohol.

Lieutenant Good is urging residents to plan ahead, use a designated driver and make sure everyone in the vehicle is buckled up.

The enforcement effort is supported by the Illinois Department of Transportation with federal highway safety funding as part of the state's ongoing effort to reduce impaired-driving crashes, injuries and deaths.

BRIDGE WORK ON ROUTE 75/STEPHENSON ST.

Another major road project is getting underway in Freeport, this time on the Route 75 Stephenson Street bridge over the Pecatonica River.

The Illinois Department of Transportation and Helm Group began work on August 20th. The project includes bridge repairs and replacement of joints on the structure. IDOT documents call for 40 working days to complete the project.



Drivers should expect narrowed lanes, delays and detours while construction is underway, although a complete bridge closure is not currently planned.

The project adds to several IDOT investments underway around Freeport this year, including bridge work along the U.S. 20 bypass.

Motorists traveling through the Stephenson Street work zone are being encouraged to allow extra time and watch for changing traffic patterns.



CITY PHOTO CONTEST IS UNDERWAY

Amateur photographers have until the end of the month to show off Freeport through their own eyes.

The City of Freeport's 2026 Photo Contest is accepting submissions through August 31st, and city officials say 15 entries arrived during just the first week.

Participants can submit up to three photographs that meet the contest guidelines, with residents encouraged to capture the people, places and scenery that help tell Freeport's story.

Winning photographs will be featured in a fall edition of the city's newsletter, highlighted on Freeport's social media accounts and displayed in the City Hall lobby for a full year.

Complete rules and submission information are available at <https://bit.ly/freeportphotocontest?utm>

The deadline to enter is August 31st.

NEW SCULPTURES COMING TO DOWNTOWN

Downtown Freeport will soon have a new collection of public art along Chicago Avenue.

The Freeport Art Museum has announced seven contemporary sculptures will be installed for the second year of the Downtown Sculpture Walk.

Removal of the current sculptures begins this month, with the new works scheduled to be in place by September 18th. This year's artists come from Iowa and Maryland, along with Batavia, Wilmette and Freeport, Illinois.

The Sculpture Walk was launched in 2025 through a partnership between the Freeport Art Museum and the city's Arts and Culture Commission, turning downtown streets into an outdoor art gallery.

The new sculptures will remain on display through August of 2027.

A public reception celebrating the new installation is planned for September 18th in partnership with the Freeport Public Library and Freeport Art Museum.



HCC TRUSTEE NAMED PRESIDENT OF STATE ASSOCIATION

A Highland Community College trustee is taking on a statewide leadership role representing Illinois community colleges.

Shawn Boldt has been elected president of the Illinois Community College Trustees Association for the 2026-27 year. The organization represents community college trustees from across Illinois.

Boldt previously served as the association's vice president and has held several other ICCTA leadership positions. He is also a former Freeport alderman and a community college graduate himself.

Boldt says his priorities include mental health and suicide prevention, accessibility for students with disabilities, technology training and improving course access in rural communities.

ICCTA leaders recently visited Highland's Freeport campus as part of an executive committee retreat, touring the college's agricultural facilities, mobile medical unit and hospital simulation labs.

Boldt says that despite his new statewide position, serving students and residents in Highland's local district remains his first priority.

PUBLIC HEARING SET FOR ZONING CHANGES IN JO DAVIESS COUNTY



Jo Daviess County residents will get another opportunity to weigh in on proposed zoning changes affecting agricultural property.

The County Board has sent several amendments back to the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals for further consideration. The proposals deal with the minimum lot size allowed in the county's Agricultural Zoning District and how much land on agricultural parcels smaller than five acres can be devoted to non-agricultural accessory uses.

Officials are also considering changing when a special-use permit would be required based on the size of a property in an agricultural district.

A public hearing is scheduled for Wednesday, August 26th at 6 p.m. in the County Board meeting room at the Jo Daviess County Courthouse in Galena.

Recommendations could return to the County Board for action as early as September 8th.



TIMBER LAKE PLAYHOUSE NEEDS DONATIONS

Timber Lake Playhouse in Mount Carroll says an outpouring of community support has helped save the theater from foreclosure.

Executive Director Russ Brown says that just last month, the theater's financial situation was so serious he questioned whether there would even be a 2027 season. But after the foreclosure became public, donors and supporters stepped forward.

The theater has now raised more than \$500,000, allowing the foreclosure to be settled and the case to move toward dismissal.

Brown says Timber Lake's financial problems date back to pandemic-era revenue losses that forced the organization to increasingly rely on advance ticket sales just to operate.

The theater isn't out of the woods yet. Its overall fundraising goal is \$1.1 million. A recent gala generated another \$120,000, and a donor has pledged \$200,000 more if the theater can raise an equal match.

Brown says the focus now is paying remaining obligations, finishing the year, and rebuilding financial reserves so Timber Lake Playhouse can have a more secure future.

REGIONAL CORN PRODUCERS ARE FACING GROWING CHALLENGES

Farmers across Northwest Illinois are heading toward harvest with concerns on both sides of the balance sheet — how much their fields will produce and how much it will cost to bring that crop in.

Recent estimates suggest Illinois corn yields could come in below last year's levels. Agricultural information service DTN projected the



statewide corn yield at about 210 bushels per acre, roughly ten bushels below its estimate for last year's crop.

Weather has been part of the concern. A wet June followed by hotter and drier conditions in July created challenges during important stages of corn development.

At the same time, farmers in Carroll, Ogle, Stephenson and Jo Daviess counties are dealing with higher energy costs. Diesel fuel is a major expense during harvest, while electricity and propane can add significantly to the cost of drying and storing grain.

Combined with uncertain commodity prices, lower yields and higher operating expenses could squeeze farm income this fall.

For Northwest Illinois producers, a successful harvest this year may depend not only on what's in the field — but what it costs to get it out.



ILLINOIS SURPASSES 200 TORNADOES IN RECORD-BREAKING YEAR

Illinois has now surpassed 200 tornadoes this year, continuing what has become a historic severe-weather season across the state.

Five tornadoes confirmed following last week's powerful derecho pushed Illinois past the 200 mark. Illinois is only the second state on record to record more than 200 tornadoes in a single year.

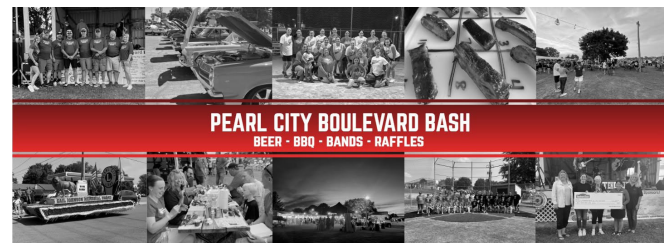
The total is far above normal. Illinois typically averages around 54 tornadoes annually, and the previous state record was 142, set in 2024.

Meteorologists say tornado activity has increasingly shifted eastward from the traditional Great Plains Tornado Alley toward states including Illinois, Indiana and Tennessee.

And with more than four months remaining in 2026, Illinois' unprecedented tornado count could climb even higher before the year is over.

PEARL CITY BOULEVARD BASH

Pearl City will be celebrating this weekend with a full day of music, food and family activities at the annual Boulevard Bash.



The event runs from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Saturday, August 22nd, with a parade, car show, kids activities, beer garden and a Pitmaster barbecue competition, including samples for festival-goers.

Three bands will provide live music throughout the day. Industrial Wood kicks things off at 11:30, followed by The Solution at 3:30, and Stereotype closing out the night beginning at 7:30.

Organizers say the Boulevard Bash isn't just a community celebration. Proceeds from the event help support projects and organizations in the Pearl City community.

That's the Pearl City Boulevard Bash, this Saturday, August 22nd.



PAINT THE PORT

Downtown Freeport will once again become a giant outdoor canvas when Paint the Port returns later this month.

The Freeport Art Museum's annual community street-painting event is scheduled for Friday, August 28th, from 4 until 8 p.m. Participants of all ages can reserve a street square and create their own artwork using supplies provided at the event.

Squares are \$16 when reserved in advance through August 27th and \$20 on the day of the event, if space remains. Each registered square also includes two tickets to Freeport Area Eats & Beats, taking place the same weekend.

Net proceeds from Paint the Port will support maintenance of the Arts Plaza and development of the Freeport Art Museum's downtown arts and culture campus.

If rain interferes, Paint the Port will move to Saturday, August 29th.

EATS & BEATS

Speaking of Eats & Beats, the celebrated event returns later this month for two nights of food, live music and fundraising for local organizations.

The festival is scheduled for August 28th and 29th at the Freeport Arts Plaza in downtown Freeport, running from 5 until 9:30 each night.

Organizers are reminding festival-goers that unused food tokens from previous years can still be redeemed. That includes red, blue and yellow tokens.



Admission is four dollars for adults, two dollars for ages six through 17, and free for children five and younger. The weekend also coincides with the Freeport Art Museum's annual Paint the Port event on Friday.

Live entertainment includes Chicago party band Hello Weekend Friday night, with Mike and Joe scheduled to perform Saturday.

Proceeds from Eats & Beats benefit participating charitable organizations in Stephenson County.



STEPHENSON COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM ICE CREAM SOCIAL

A longtime Stephenson County summer tradition is moving to Lena this year—and helping support tornado recovery in the process.

The Stephenson County Historical Society will hold its annual Ice Cream Social Saturday, August 29th, from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Lena Area Historical Museum.

Road construction near the Historical Society's Freeport museum made hosting the event there difficult, so organizers decided to use the occasion to support their neighbors in Lena.

The Lena museum's main building escaped major damage from the April 17th tornado, but two of its historic buildings were damaged.

The National Weather Service says the EF-2 tornado that struck Lena had estimated peak winds of 130 miles per hour and traveled about eight-and-a-half miles.

Organizers say the Ice Cream Social will help raise awareness of Lena's historic buildings and their continuing recovery needs.

GALENA'S 200TH BIRTHDAY

One of Northwest Illinois' most historic communities is celebrating a major milestone this year, as Galena marks its 200th birthday.

Galena's bicentennial commemorates December 1826, when residents of what was then known as the Village on Fever River voted to adopt the name Galena — a reference to the lead ore that helped fuel the community's early growth.

The former mining and river town would become one of Illinois' most prominent 19th-century communities and later the home of Civil War general and U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant. Today, Galena is known for its remarkably preserved historic downtown and draws more than a million visitors annually.

The city is celebrating throughout 2026 with historical programs and community events. A Bicentennial Corn Boil and Music Festival is planned for August 29th at Recreation Park.

The yearlong celebration culminates December 27th — Galena's official 200th birthday — with a birthday party and drone show.

IN CLOSING

Before we go, a quick programming note. If you'd rather read the news than listen to it, we've got you covered. Every week, we post a complete written version of this newscast on our website at freepod.org. It's a great way to catch up on local news at your own pace or revisit a story you want to read in more detail.

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And it's not just our newscasts either. Our interviews are available to listen to anytime as well, including this past week's interview. Freepod host Tim Connors spoke to Andy Fruth, president of the Kiwanis Club of Freeport. Andy and Tim chatted about the mission of the Kiwanis Club and the finer points of Pretzel Pride.

We'd like to thank our community liaisons and reporters for providing pivotal content for our program, our



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This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.



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