



**9 January
2025**

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 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!

Minimum wage hike and other new Illinois laws

Many people are aware that Illinois' minimum wage is now officially \$15 an hour, up from \$14 per hour in 2024, but in addition to that change in law, nearly 300 new laws went into effect on January 1st. From bills pertaining to digital drivers' licenses, health insurance, paying college athletes, and which hotels can offer mini-sized shampoo bottles, nearly 300 new laws are now on the books in Illinois. According to the Illinois General Assembly's website, at least 293 bills are now new laws.

FREEPOD has found two websites with complete lists and lots of details about these laws for you to explore. One is 5 Chicago, a local television station website in Chicago. You can find info there at <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/chicago-politics/new-illinois-laws-for-2025-a-look-at-whats-changing-this-new-year/3635717/> The second site can be found at <https://www.illinoispolicy.org/digital-licenses-shampoo-bottles-15-wage-illinois-new-laws-for-2025/>

Whether you like them or loathe them, there is a lot to learn about how these laws may affect you in 2025, and we hope you will check these sites for details.

2025 BASE Camp open for registration

The Greater Freeport Partnership is hosting the 2025 BASE Camp, with BASE being an acronym for Business Academy for Small Businesses & Entrepreneurs. This comprehensive program is designed to equip aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners with the essential knowledge and skills needed to succeed in today's competitive market.

Now in its second year, BASE Camp consists of six evening classes spread over 12 weeks, starting on Tuesday, January 28th. Program highlights include business planning, market assessment, and

competitor research, all led by local business experts through presentations and interactive activities. Graduates of the full series can compete in a Business Pitch Competition for \$2,000 in cash prizes to help grow their business.

The fee for the full series of six classes is \$200, and individual classes can be attended for \$50 each. Scholarships are available to cover up to \$150 of the full series for those who demonstrate a need. The scholarship questionnaire is available in the BASE Camp registration.

Interested participants can register for the full series or individual classes by visiting the Greater Freeport Partnership website at greaterfreeport.com/basecamp.

SMART IDEAS & EDUCATION
**TO START & GROW
YOUR BUSINESS**

Join us for a six-class series over 12 weeks to elevate your knowledge of small business principles including finance, legal structures, marketing, and more. Evening classes begin January 28.

REGISTER ONLINE,
OR CALL 815-233-1350

For more information & to register
greaterfreeport.com/basecamp

**GREATER
FREEPORT
PARTNERSHIP**

**THE FOUNDATION
for Northwest Illinois**
Serving Stephenson, Jo Daviess & Carroll Counties

BASE CAMP
BUSINESS ACADEMY FOR
SMALL BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURS

Female firefighter joins Freeport Fire Department

The Freeport Fire Department continues to be a trendsetter as they hire another female firefighter to join the ranks. Kellie Beranek was sworn in by Mayor Jodi Miller at a City Council meeting and will now begin her training. Kellie follows in the footsteps of Mary Tessororf and Hilary Broshous as women that have chosen firefighting for their careers in Freeport.



Mayor Jodi Miller congratulates Kellie Beranek after swearing her in as the newest Freeport firefighter. Kellie now will begin her training and be assigned to a shift upon graduation.

Adams Avenue Project Officially Complete

The City has announced the official completion of the \$10.4 million Adams Avenue reconstruction project which began in June 2023. Work on this main thoroughfare included new water, sewer, and storm water infrastructure, curb, street surface, a bike lane on Adams Avenue from Float to Arcade, and a new water main from Float to Exchange.

Helm Group, Fehr Graham, and City Public Works crews all played roles in this historic project which will greatly improve services for the residents of the City for many years to come.

ComEd to continue tree trimming

ComEd plans to continue preventative tree trimming in Freeport throughout January. A detailed map of what will be trimmed where can be found on the City's website at bit.ly/trimmap.

Get Fit for 2025

FHN's popular Get Fit Program to help participants work towards your best health is back for 2025. Get Fit 2025 is a free 12-week online program beginning and ending with in-person screenings. Participants can join as an individual or as part of a 4-person team. From January 19th through April 13th, participants receive newsletters with healthy lifestyle information including video exercise tips and recipes. They also can take advantage of special offers from local fitness partners, participate in fun contests, and win great prizes while building a healthy lifestyle.

Participants must attend both an initial and ending screening to be eligible for this year's major prizes. The program signup includes the ability to schedule an appointment for a kick-off screening from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 14th or 8:00 to 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, January 18th at FHN Family Healthcare Center - Burchard Hills in Freeport. The signup for FHN's Get Fit 2025 is open now at www.fhn.org/getfit.

National Day of Racial Healing

On January 18th, the Freeport Branch of the NAACP will host the Freeport area's National Day of Racial Healing at the Stephenson County Farm Bureau building in Freeport at 210 West Spring Street from 9:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. This national celebration is dedicated to fostering understanding and promoting healing in our community. It brings people together to engage in meaningful conversations and activities that promote unity and respect.

The event begins with a continental breakfast at 9:00 and is followed with a keynote address by Jason Smith, Dean of Students & Restorative Trainer/Facilitator at Dundee-Crown High School in Carpentersville, Illinois. The day continues with breakout sessions and panels through 1:15 p.m.

This event is coordinated by a broad committee of community representatives and is free and open to the public. Reserve your spot at [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com) by searching on "National Day of Racial Healing" and selecting the Freeport location. That's www.eventbrite.com, with "brite" spelled b-r-i-t-e.

United Way receives funding

The United Way of Northwest Illinois has announced that Stephenson County has been awarded nearly \$21,000 in Federal funds made available under the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act. These funds will be used to supplement emergency food and shelter programs through the Emergency Food and Shelter Program allocations.

HCC manufacturing programs taking off

Highland Community College has kicked off the last two semesters by more than doubling spaces for students interested in being part of their manufacturing programs.

The refurbished CNC and CAD learning lab was unveiled this Fall and the Spring term began with a similar welding lab expansion. These programs will prepare students for well-paying positions in machining and computer-aided design.

Northwest Illinois Bird and Nature Alliance

The Northwest Illinois Audubon Society has changed its name to the Northwest Illinois Bird and Nature Alliance following community input to identify a name that reflects common interests and lets the public know that the organization is all-welcoming and inclusive.

The name change comes after the National Audubon Society itself undertook exploration of a national name change in 2023. The local organization has had three different names since its formation in 1972 and will continue to be a chapter of National Audubon Society, giving it access to many resources such as educational sessions and materials for local programs.

People who are currently National Audubon Society members and live in the FREEPOD geographic area will continue to receive six newsletters each year from the national organization. As in the past, membership will also be available at a local-only level for those who want to specifically support Northwest Illinois Bird and Nature Alliance, including support for the organization's two regional Biodiversity Preserves.

The newly named Northwest Illinois Bird and Nature Alliance will continue to offer monthly programs, bird outings, field trips, birdseed sales, and prairie and woodland stewardship, as well as youth and family programs on the benefits of nature.

Dance Against Cancer Ball

Flight Radio 105.7 and the Eagles Club are hosting a 70's & 80's Dance Against Cancer Ball next Saturday, January 18th from 7:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. to raise funds for the Leonard C. Ferguson Cancer Center at FHN Memorial Hospital. The night will be filled with guest speakers from FHN Memorial Hospital, a 50/50 raffle, and a silent auction, as well as Chicago's very own DJ *Flash* spinning 70s and 80s tunes and The Real Deal Band performing live.

Tickets are \$25 in advance and \$30 at the door and businesses can sponsor a table in their name for \$100. For more information, contact the Club at wqjt.info@gmail.com. That's wqjt.info@gmail.com, and don't forget to wear your vintage 70s or 80s outfit to the event!

Is travel a New Years' resolution?

If travel is on your list of New Years' resolutions, you'll want to attend a presentation by the Stephenson County Farm Bureau and Tri State travel next Thursday, January 15th at 5:00 p.m. where you can learn more about a Mackinaw Island trip in 2025 and a trip to Australia and New Zealand in 2026.

Please call the Farm Bureau at 815-232-3186 to help ensure that there will be enough materials for all attendees. The program is free and these trips are open to everyone, not just Farm Bureau members. The Farm Bureau is located at 210 West Spring Street in Freeport.

Looking ahead

There's plenty else going on too as we look ahead. Just for starters, this Saturday, January 11th is the 10th anniversary of the Lena Brewing Company, and they'll be celebrating with beer specials all day and live music from Blue Steel from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

This Saturday, January 11th is also a Saturday for the Stephenson County Winter Farmers Market at the Farm Bureau Building at 210 West Spring Street. From 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. you can browse taste treats like home-baked bread and desserts, homemade jams and jellies, and crafts.

Just like the second Saturday of every month, therapy dogs will be at the Freeport Public Library this Saturday from 11:00 to noon 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 share with them.

And looking a bit further ahead, you can learn how to make a soy candle at The Stephenson Farm Bureau at a candle making workshop from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday, January 21st. Just call the Farm Bureau for pricing and registration details at 815-232-3186. That's 815-232-3186.

Soy candle making? New beers being launched? Concerts and musical events? Comedy nights? Yes indeed there's a LOT going on around Freeport! As a reminder, 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 below if you'd like to sign up that way.

*The QR code below will subscribe you to the weekly events newsletter
from the Greater Freeport Partnership.*

What's Going on in Stephenson County?

Subscribe to our weekly event guide!



While you're signing up for more of what's going on in our community, you can also subscribe to the City of Freeport's monthly newsletter at their website, www.cityoffreeport.org, or by using their QR code that appears below.

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In closing...

In closing, be sure to tune in to next week's Tuesday in-depth interview featuring FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Tim Connors speaking with Josh Elliott, owner of Elliott Graphix and Zealous Art Studio and Tattoo as they talk about tattooing, community involvement, and all things Freeport. Their conversation will post at noon on Tuesday, January 14th.

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 partner, WNIJ National Public Radio in DeKalb, at www.northernpublicradio.org.

As always, 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.

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