



**20 November
2025**

Welcome to FREEPD, 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. Now let's see what's happening.

City news

By the Fall of 2026, South Street will be repaved from Locust Avenue to Galena Avenue. This will include the construction of 16 new ADA ramps at intersections such as Walnut Avenue and Locust Avenue as South Street will be repaved from Locust to Galena Avenue.

In related street safety news, crash data has shown that Freeport has had 87% more accidents in the last several years according to Fehr Graham and Safety Action Consultant Darin Stykel. Last year, Fehr Graham hired an independent study to draft the safety action plan based on data collected about dangerous interactions and crash sites that had been studied for over a year. The study included information related to pedestrians, bicycles, motorcycles, and different types of motorized vehicles. The offset intersection for Walnut and Empire and Adams Avenues are two areas that Stykel hopes will be improved.

Potential improvements include roundabouts, bike paths, and sidewalks for which the City would need millions of dollars in grants. To receive those, the Freeport City council needs to approve it, which could be done in December. Other innovations in the city feature signage and reduction lanes.

With snow in the forecast, the City also reminds residents of the odd/even parking during snow-plowing season. This is already in effect and will continue through the end of March when there is more than half an inch of snow. For example, if two inches of snow fell during the evening tonight, November 13th, that would mean that the ODD-numbered side of the street needs to be free for snowplows to do their job tomorrow by 8:00 a.m. and you need to park your vehicle on the EVEN-numbered side of the street before then. All vehicles parked incorrectly are subject to towing at the owner's cost.

This system is essential in ensuring a safe and efficient plowing season for our crews. Many streets in Freeport are narrow and can often create road blocks for large plows.

Pretzel City Transit Changes

The City and Pretzel City Area Transit are launching a major planning initiative to evaluate the development of a public transit system within the City that follow regular fixed routes. The goal is to finalize the route design and supporting policies and implement the new system on July 1, 2026.

This initiative comes in response to increasing ridership demand within city limits and the community's growing need for more reliable, predictable, and accessible transportation options. Pretzel City Transit currently operates a countywide demand-response service, providing more than 50,000 trips annually across Stephenson County. Over the past 200 days alone, more than 90% of all their began and ended within Freeport, highlighting a concentrated need for efficient in-city transit service. Service in the county outside Freeport is anticipated to remain on a demand-response basis.

To ensure the new system reflects the needs of Freeport residents, the City will host a series of public meetings and outreach sessions beginning in early 2026.

South Street CVS closes

One of two CVS stores in Freeport closed permanently on November 18th. A sign on the door was posted weeks ago informing customers the store on South Street would be closing. All prescriptions will be transferred to the remaining CVS store at the corner of Galena Avenue and Park Boulevard. Hours there are 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. every day.

Trans-Siberian Christmas concert



The Greater Freeport Partnership is once again presenting a Trans-Siberian Orchestra tribute event for the holiday season. The Christmas Wizards will perform at the Freeport Masonic Temple on Saturday, December 13th at 6:00 p.m. Ticket prices range from \$25 to \$50 and are available online through three sources at links below.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/christmas-wizards-a-night-of-tso-tickets-1591864903779>

<https://aftontickets.com/event/buyticket/p79plny0xk>

<https://meetingsforevercom.ticketspice.com/christmas-wizards-2025>

FHN receives recognition

At a recent event celebrating National Rural Health Day, FHN was honored with the National Center for Rural Health Professions Rural Health Care Hero Organization award. The event, hosted every November by the University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford, highlights successes over the past year in tackling healthcare shortages and fostering healthy communities in rural areas.

FHN President and CEO Mark Gridley also took part in a panel discussion with representatives from the Illinois Rural Health Association, healthcare leaders from Dixon and Mendota and graduates and students of the University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford graduates and students about the Power of Rural Health.



Pictured left to right at the event are FHN staff members Clay Cunningham, Lori McGuire, Dr. Rebecca Pedersen, Sarah Kramer, Dr. Clarence Parks, and President & CEO Mark Gridley.

Highland Distinguished Alumni

Highland Community College is proud to celebrate Abigayle Endress, Javier Jazo, Stacey Kleindl, Elizabeth Chambers-Priller, Caleb Young, and Alicia Kepner as their 2025 Distinguished Alumni. These alumni began their journey at Highland and were selected for their dedication to elevating their communities and giving back through service, leadership, and a shared belief in the mission of higher education. Congratulations and thank you from FREEPOD to all of you!

"The Best Christmas Pageant Ever" is Almost Here!

Get ready for one of the funniest and most heartwarming holiday shows of the season when The Curtain Call Academy of Winneshiek Playhouse presents *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever!* next Friday, December 5th at 7:00 p.m. and Saturday, December 6th at 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. Tickets are just \$10 each and can be ordered online at www.ticketleap.events/.../the-best-christmas The Winneshiek Playhouse encourages you to get your tickets soon as the three performances are expected to sell out.

Hope Wins selected by 100 Women Who Care

Hope WINS was recently chosen as the fourth quarter recipient of funding from 100 Women Who Care--Stephenson County. Hope WINS educates and equips parents and children with tools and skills necessary for healthy relationships through parent coaching, mentoring, family enrichment events, support groups, and camp experiences for children.

100 Women Who Care meets quarterly to select a non-profit recipient of a significant financial award funded by its members. Congratulations, Hope Wins!

Step Back in Time for a Victorian Christmas Tea

The Stephenson County Historical Society invites everyone to experience the magic of the season at the Christmas Memories Tea next Saturday, December 6, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the beautiful and historic Taylor Mansion on the grounds of the Stephenson County Historical Museum at 1440 South Carroll Avenue in Freeport.

Guests can stroll through the elegantly decorated home, sip warm tea, and enjoy the nostalgic sights and sounds of the holidays as they were celebrated over a century ago. The Taylor Home will be open for tours and the Museum Gift Shop will also be open for holiday shopping, featuring unique local gifts, history books, and seasonal treasures. Parking is limited on museum grounds but visitors are encouraged to use street parking or the church parking lot located at the corner of Empire and Carroll. Admission is free although donations are appreciated to help preserve our community's history.

Freeport High School grad is a standout for the Baltimore Ravens

Freeport native Keondre Jackson has gone from being undrafted to being an emerging standout for the NFL's Baltimore Ravens on their special teams coverage units. Jackson has played in the Ravens' last five games and recently in a game against the Vikings he forced a fumble on a kick return by punching the ball away and then also recovered the fumble. He is listed as second string at safety on the Ravens' depth chart.

In high school at Freeport, Jackson was a first team NIC-10 defensive back. He then was a star at Illinois State University and in his last year there he was All-MVFC First Team at safety. He was also named an FCS All-American by Phil Steele, AP, and Stats Perform. Way to go, Keondre!

Giving Tuesday

Giving Tuesday is celebrated the Tuesday after Thanksgiving so we hope you will take the opportunity to support The United Way of Northwest Illinois and other charities next Tuesday, December 2nd. This global generosity movement encourages people to rally around the causes they believe in, and help build stronger, healthier and more sustainable communities.

The United Way of Northwest Illinois has many ways you can choose to help. For example, donate \$5 and you provide two children Dolly Parton Imagination Library books this month. \$10 helps provide home-delivered meals to seniors in our region. The power of any amount you donate is supercharged by the collective giving! For more local opportunities to give back, visit the United Way website at www.uwni.org/givingtuesday.

Store your driver's license on your phone

Many Illinois residents are now able to store their driver's licenses and IDs on their cellphones. Digital IDs will first be available for iPhones and Apple Watches via the Apple Wallet app, and the new mobile IDs "will soon expand" to Google and Samsung wallets for Android devices.

Many businesses and other entities, including Transportation Security Administration agents at more than 250 airports nationwide, are equipped to accept and scan digital IDs. You must still carry physical IDs when driving as law enforcement is not required to accept the digital form.

For more information on how to load your license onto your phone, just do a quick search on "how to add driver's license to cellphones in Illinois" in any search engine or visit

<https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/how-to-add-a-digital-illinois-drivers-license-to-your-apple-wallet/3853983/>

Farm Bureau bus trip to Chicago

On Friday, December 12th the Carroll and Stephenson County Farm Bureaus are hosting a bus trip to Chicago and the Christkindlmarket. The bus will depart from the Freeport Walmart at 8:00 a.m. and arrive at the Christkindlmarket between 10:30a.m. and 11:00a.m. The Christkindlmarket is outdoors and can include as much or as little walking as participants would like, and attendees are also free to leave the Market at their own expense to enjoy other seasonal delights in Chicago. The bus will depart the Market at 7:00 p.m. for the return trip, arriving back at the Freeport Walmart about 9:30 p.m. Cost for the trip is \$45 for Illinois Farm Bureau members and \$65 for non-Farm Bureau members and includes transportation, parking, and driver gratuities. To register please call the Stephenson County Farm Bureau 815-232-3186. That's 815-232-3186.

Consumer energy costs slowed

The Illinois Commerce Commission recently sharply cut rate increases proposed by Nicor Gas and Ameren Illinois, slowing the speed of rising energy bills for customers in Illinois.

Instead of approving the full \$314 million requested by Nicor and \$129 million requested by Ameren, the Commission cut 47% and 43% from the requests respectively, resulting in a rate increase of \$168 million for Nicor and \$73 million for Ameren Illinois.

Nicor originally requested a rate increase that ended up at \$314 million and was estimated by the company to raise typical residential bills by about \$7.50 per month or about 9%. The request was the largest in state history. Following the Commission's actions, Nicor estimated that typical residential customers would see an increase of less than \$4.25 monthly, or less than 5% annually. Ameren, which provides natural gas delivery to approximately 816,000 customers in central and southern Illinois, filed in January for a \$134 million rate increase that a spokesperson said would increase typical residential bills by about \$9.09 per month or an 11.9% increase. Ameren has not yet issued new increase calculations following the decision by the Commission.

The companies had said the increases were needed to fund replacements or retirements of aging infrastructure for gas transmission lines and upgrades to gas storage facilities. The current increases are the fifth for Nicor since 2017 and the fourth for Ameren since 2018.

The Citizens Utility Board, a nonprofit Illinois utility watchdog group also known by the acronym CUB, contrasted the costs for consumers with the utilities' growing profits over the same periods.

Should you warm up your car before driving?

As Freeport heads into some pretty cold temperatures this holiday season, you may want to know that auto experts are debunking a longtime myth about driving in cold weather. AAA, a federation of motor clubs, recommends drivers start their engine and allow it to idle only for the time it takes to fasten their seat belts. According to AAA, driving your car normally and avoiding hard acceleration will warm up the engine faster than leaving it idle for several minutes. In addition to unnecessary engine wear, the Environmental Protection Agency says letting your car idle causes air pollution and wastes fuel. According to Carfax, the warm-up routine started decades ago when vehicles were more prone to stalling in frigid temperatures because they had carburetors.

There's one exception: electric vehicles. While most internal combustion engines don't require time to warm up, EV owners may need to take some action before getting on the road. Batteries tend to perform best at about 70 degrees and when temperatures fall, battery performance degrades, with some owners reporting a 10% to 20% reduced range when temperatures are below freezing. EV owners are encouraged to precondition their vehicle to heat the battery and vehicle interior to operating temperatures. The Department of Energy says the practice is best executed while the vehicle is plugged in to ensure the battery is sufficiently charged.

The week ahead...



As we look at the week ahead, we're looking forward to the start of the FHN Community Festival of Trees at the Freeport Public Library on Monday, where local non-profits have decorated many beautiful trees as they compete for cash prizes for their organizations. You can cast a ballot the Library for your favorite tree through December 28th and whether or not you're voting, enjoying the trees is a favorite community pastime during the holiday season.

We've also been reminded that tickets are going fast for the performance of The Messiah at Highland Community College at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 14th. The event features five guest soloists with Freeport roots, including Dagny Brandt, a vocal instructor at Highland for many years; Todd McMillion, long-time member of the Highland Chorale; Highland graduate and Summerset regular Erin Schrader; Ross Berkley, Dixon native and long-recognized performer; and Michelle Maves Delgenio, a Freeport High School graduate well known in the Freeport area who currently resides in New York. All of the instrumentalists are local to the area and have been affiliated with Highland for a number of years.

Next Wednesday, December 3rd, movie enthusiasts can enjoy the December film in the Lindo Theatre's Select Pix Classic Film Series hosted by Ed Finch and FREEPOD host Alan Wenzel. The movie is *The Thin Man* from 1934 and stars William Powell and Myrna Loy in the comedic story of high-class detective couple solving crimes along with their dog Asta. Showtimes are 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. at regular ticket prices, and attendees are invited to stay after the show for a discussion about the film and a question and answer session. 2025 is the 15th year for the popular film series hosted by Finch and Wenzel.

And finally, as you sit down to your pumpkin pie this Thanksgiving remember that Illinois Farmers grow more pumpkins than anywhere else in the world. In fact, they grow 90-95% of the pumpkins used for processing. Most of the processing takes place in Morton, Illinois, the Pumpkin Capital of the World. And on the topic of pumpkin pie specifically, the largest pumpkin pie ever was baked in 2010, and weighed in at 3,699 pounds! It was 20 feet in diameter and made with 1,212 pounds of canned pumpkin, 233 dozen eggs, 109 gallons of evaporated milk, 525 pounds of sugar, 7 pounds of salt, 14.5 pounds of cinnamon, and 3 pounds of pumpkin pie spice. Wow.

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.

We also wanted to remind everyone that we're really enjoying the great in-depth interviews you can hear every week on FREEPOD, and are sure you will too if you're not already! This week's interview featured FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Becky Connors visiting with Captain Lisa of the Salvation Army about their programs. The interview, which first aired the day before yesterday on Tuesday, is available online and can be listened to anytime.

Next Tuesday, FREEPOD host Alan Wenzel visits with local resident Larry Feiner about building memories with family and friends by engaging in outdoor activities, which Larry does through hunting and fishing. Their conversation will post at noon on Tuesday, December 2nd 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.

In closing...

In closing, as we've mentioned before, we need your help! 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.

And speaking of increasing our presence remember that FREEPOD is now on YouTube! The program is currently audio only but having it on YouTube gives you another super-easy way to listen. You can find both English and Spanish versions – just head to YouTube.com and search for FREEPOD or click the link in the print version at <https://www.youtube.com/@FREEPOD61032/podcasts>. Please tell all your friends and family members about our YouTube channel too – everything you do can help get local news out to our community!

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 – 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



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