



**18 December  
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](http://www.freepod.org)) and the website of our NPR partner WNJI Northern Public Radio ([www.northernpublicradio.org](http://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**

The City of Freeport will continue its Re-Fresh program in 2026 after a successful year of curbing illegal dumping of trash and bulky items. From January to November, over 288 tons of bulk trash was collected at the Freeport Transfer Station at no additional cost to Freeport residents. In that same span, 563 mattresses were collected that were dumped illegally. As a reminder, residents who live within the city limits can bring trash and bulk items to the Freeport Transfer Station located at 2133 South Walnut Road from 8:00 to 11:00 a.m., across from Honeywell Plant 4, on the first Saturday of each month

The snow hasn't all melted and with holiday parties in full swing we wanted to remind everyone that odd/event parking is in effect and will continue through the end of March whenever there is more than half an inch of snow. For example, if two inches of snow fell tonight, December 18th, that would mean that since 18 is an even number the EVEN-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 ODD-numbered side of the street before then. Many streets in Freeport are narrow and can often create road blocks for large plows, and vehicles parked incorrectly are subject to towing at the owner's cost.

### **Partnership Cash makes a great gift!**

Need great last-minute gifts that can exactly match what's on your recipients' gift lists? The Partnership Cash program from the Greater Freeport Partnership is a perfect choice! Partnership Cash can be used just like regular cash at nearly 50 local merchants and businesses in Stephenson County. To order, give Billy at the Partnership a call at 815-233-1350 and let him know how much you need. He will have it ready for you to pick up at the Greater Freeport Partnership office on Main Street in Freeport. That's Billy at 815-233-1350.

### **Temporary break coming in ComEd pricing**

FREEPOD has reported several times in the last couple of months about climbing utility rates and the options for electrical providers in the Freeport area so we thought you might like to know that the Climate & Equitable Jobs Act will provide ComEd customers an average credit of roughly \$13 per month from January through May in 2026.

The Climate and Equitable Jobs Act, also known as the CEJA, is a landmark 2021 Illinois law setting ambitious clean energy and decarbonization goals, phasing out fossil fuels, and investing heavily in green jobs, workforce training (especially for underserved communities), and electric vehicle infrastructure, while also reforming utility regulations to ensure accountability and equity. Its goal is to achieve 100% clean energy by 2045 as it creates a national model for climate policy. CEJA is considered one of the most comprehensive climate laws in the USA, balancing aggressive environmental goals with economic development, labor interests, and critical social equity provisions.

### **Lady Pretzels atop the NIC-10**

The Lady Pretzels won a decisive 64-50 basketball game against the Hononegah Lady Indians last Friday night in a big NIC-10 matchup. Both teams came into the game 3-0 in conference play. The Lady Indians had a three-game win streak while the Lady Pretzels had a seven-game win streak. The Pretzels got off to a fast start, leading 21-10 after the first quarter and never lost the lead after that. Freeport superstar Paityn London led the Pretzels with 24 points, while Keagan Huggins added 11. Freeport is now 9-1 overall and 4-0 in conference play.

The game followed another win against Jefferson, bringing back memories of the previous time Paityn London and the Pretzels took the court at Jefferson High School in January 2025 when London scored a school record 48 points.

Keep it up Lady Pretzels -- FREEPOD is cheering you on!

### **Deadline near for HCC Spring registration**

Registration for Spring classes at Highland Community Colleges closes at the end of day next Tuesday, December 23<sup>rd</sup>, and the last days for express registration are January 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup>. There are classes for everyone so be sure to check out their online catalog at [www.highland.edu](http://www.highland.edu).

### **HCC Call for Entries in Juried Art Exhibit**

In other Highland news, the College is calling for entries for the 55th District Juried Art Exhibit which will be the first exhibition of the Spring 2026 semester. The show will be on view beginning February 11th in the Ferguson Fine Arts Center. Submissions are due January 28<sup>th</sup> and more information can be found at [www.highland.edu/juriedart](http://www.highland.edu/juriedart) or contact Bill Buehler at 815-599-3490 or [bill.buehler@highland.edu](mailto:bill.buehler@highland.edu).

This annual exhibition is designed to recognize local artists in the Highland district, and to celebrate their visual contribution to the community. The competition is open to all residents age 18 and older living in the Highland Community College district, as well as all currently enrolled HCC students.

### **Freeport Art Museum receives grant**

The Freeport Art Museum has received a \$28,750 grant to support its smArt After School outreach program from the Thomas G. and Mary Alyce Bartels Memorial of the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois in Rockford.

The smArt After School program, which serves youth aged 7-12, is a multidisciplinary arts initiative designed to provide consistent, high-quality arts education. Since its inception in 2015, the program has expanded to reach more than 300 students annually. It is delivered in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of Freeport and Stephenson County and the YMCA's School-Aged Child Care program.

### **Spring 2026 Art Explorers registration open**

In other news from the Freeport Art Museum, registration is now open for the Museum's Spring 2026 Art Explorers program. The Art Explorers classes dive into a wide variety of art-making media and techniques, giving students hands-on exposure to creativity that is appropriate for a homeschool art curriculum. For more information, contact the Museum at 815-235-9755 or visit <https://www.freeportartmuseum.com/home-school?rq=HOMESCHOOL>

### **Pesticide Applicator Training begins**



December marks the start of in-person pesticide applicator training sessions across the state, led by the University of Illinois Extension Pesticide Safety Education Program and the Illinois Department of Agriculture. In Illinois, you need pesticide applicator training and a license if you apply restricted-use pesticides on your own land or if you apply any general or restricted pesticide for hire, for your employer, or for a government agency. In short, if your work or land management involves pesticides beyond simple personal use of general products, you likely need training and a license in Illinois

Learn more about what to expect, how to plan ahead, testing options for both in-person and online, schedule, registration details, continuing education credits, and who to contact with questions. Start with the simplified way to register for training in

Pesticide News by searching on “pesticide applicator training” at the University of Illinois website at [www.illinois.edu](http://www.illinois.edu) or click <https://extension.illinois.edu/.../2025-10-31-know>

## **Annual Christmas Bird Count**

It's time once again for the Northwest Illinois Bird and Nature Alliance to participate in the annual Christmas Bird Count and the local count day is planned for this Saturday, December 20<sup>th</sup>. Both experienced birders and novice birders can help by being a field counter on the day of the count. Those with little or no experience will be paired with a more experienced person.

Field counting is mostly done from vehicles with some walking done in appropriate areas, and observations at BIRD FEEDERS are also an important part of Christmas Bird Count data. To be a feeder counter you must be within the official count circle which extends seven and one-half miles out from its center in Read Park in Freeport.

Please call Richard Benning, the area's local CBC compiler at 815-865-5279 if you would like to be either a field counter or a feeder counter in this year's Christmas Bird Count. That's 815-865-5279.

This will be the 50th time that the local chapter has taken part in this in this large-scale, long standing endeavor to take one-day snapshots of types of bird species and numbers of each in approximately 2500 count circles throughout the Western Hemisphere.



## **Smart salting tips**

Counting birds is just one time to enjoy our beautiful part of Illinois and we hope folks will take some simple steps this winter to keep from slip-sliding on walks and in driveways while still preventing harm to rivers and wildlife that occurs every winter when excess salt washes into local streams, wetlands, and eventually the Mississippi River. Once chloride from salt enters freshwater, it can't be removed, and it threatens fish, mussels, amphibians, and even our drinking water. Here's what you can do at home to help minimize its effects:

1. First, spread smart! Only a coffee mug's worth of salt for an entire driveway is needed.
2. Then be patient and let it work. Remember salt needs time to work, usually about 15 to 20 minutes.
3. Once the salt has done its work, sweep up leftovers to reuse after the next storm! That creates less waste and saves money for you too!
4. You can also try effective alternatives like sand, pet-safe melts that keep paws safe, and beet brine.

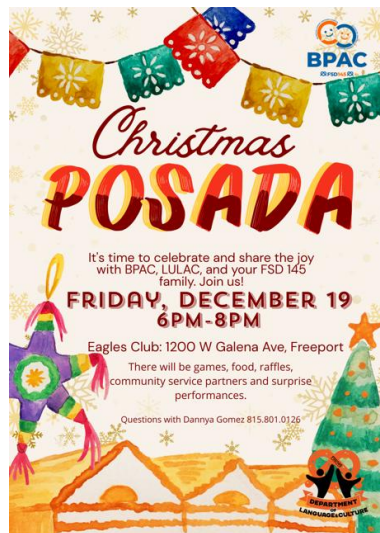
Try these simple ideas to stay safe yourself and keep the environment safe too!

## **Freeport area Posada celebration**

It's time for the Latin American Christmas tradition of Las Posadas, a nine-night community reenactment that began on Tuesday, December 16<sup>th</sup> and continues through Christmas Eve. It symbolizes the journey of Mary and Joseph seeking shelter and often includes door-to-door singing, processions, prayer, food, piñatas, and festive gatherings that symbolize faith and community unity.

The Freeport-area Posada will be celebrated tomorrow night, Friday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, at the Eagles Club at 1200 West Galena Ave. From 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. attendees will enjoy games, food, raffles, a live DJ, community service partners, a student' ballet participation activity, and surprise performances.

The event is hosted by Freeport School District 145, the District's Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee, and the League of United Latin American Citizens or LULAC, which was founded in 1929 and is the oldest and largest Hispanic civil rights organization in the United States. For questions or info, please contact Dannya Gomez at 815-801-0126. That's 815-801-0126.



### Bells are still ringing!

The Salvation Army still needs bell ringers for their annual fundraising drive, and you can come to their rescue. Just head to [www.RegisterToRing.com](http://www.RegisterToRing.com) to choose your time and location. It's very simple and you can brighten someone's day while supporting the Salvation Army.

Please also don't forget that donations of food are still needed. Help make someone's Christmas dinner a little better by dropping off non-perishable groceries at 106 West Exchange Street, across the street from the Stephenson County Courthouse. You can also make a cash donation that the Salvation Army can use to purchase groceries at <https://centralusa.salvationarmy.org/freeport/>. They are also collecting winter coats, hats, gloves, mittens, and scarves to keep our community warm in the cold winter days that have begun.

### Holiday movie at Winneshiek Playhouse

Families can enjoy a holiday movie and also visit with Santa Claus during the Merry Little Christmas Family event this Saturday, December 20<sup>th</sup> from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Winneshiek Playhouse in downtown Freeport. Santa will be there for photos and to hear Christmas wish lists and then he'll watch

a family Christmas movie with everyone who attends. There will also be crafts with Santa, cookies and cocoa, and a Toy Raffle. Admission is \$5 per child at the door.



### **A very individualized gift for you and your family**

Before we close, we have one more idea for a holiday gift that will be completely unique to you and your family: how about the gift of exploring your own family history? The Stephenson County Genealogy Society located at the Freeport Public Library can lend a hand by helping you search for information about your family ancestors through local newspapers on microfilm, cemetery transcripts, city directories, school yearbooks, county histories, family histories, and more. They also can provide access to the library edition of Ancestry.com.



Experts are there to assist in person at specific times and you can also connect with them online to request research help. For more information, visit the Stephenson Count Genealogy Society online at [www.stephcogenealogy.org](http://www.stephcogenealogy.org). There's also a link for information in Green County. Your family tree will live on in memories long after that Christmas tree is recycled!

## **Holiday decorations to enjoy from your car!**

As we did for Halloween, FREEPOD has put together a list of locations boasting impressive holiday decorations to enjoy on a fun evening drive around the community. Many different types of themes are represented and some are very elaborate while others are delightfully simple. In some cases, we've identified a whole part of a neighborhood where there are many displays. This is not a contest so no display is in competition with any others – each stands on its own, in its own neighborhood, and we'd like to thank all the folks in these homes for the efforts they have undertaken to light up the holidays with joy for everyone!

1. Corner of Greenfield Drive and Cheyenne (turn right off of US 20 heading west out of town)
2. There might have to be a contest to determine which of these next two homes has the biggest display of inflatables!
  - a. Smith Street between Harlem and Whistler (turn on Smith across from KFC)
  - b. 1728 South Chicago (turn south on Chicago off South Street)
3. 600 block of Greenfield Drive near Sioux Drive
4. Turn on Sioux Dr. and then onto Country Court and wind through most of the streets in the whole Wheatland Terrace area
5. Chelsea Drive - turn right off of Illinois 26 North at the bank (Fairview Drive) then either right and/or left on Chelsea: 703 Chelsea Drive to the left (north) has an animated display with radio accompaniment and the subdivision to the right (south) is also all lit up
6. Several on Illinois 26 driving south to Walmart/Menards
7. 1109 Locust Avenue just off the corner of Locust and Moseley
8. 1925 Bedford
9. 1849 Revere
10. 716 McKinley
11. 1475 Deming at the corner of Deming and La Cresta – here' the tallest tree we saw at a home, and it might be the tallest lighted real tree anywhere in town!
12. Corner of Cherry and Pleasant
13. 994 Henderson, head north on Henderson and it's one of the last houses on the west side before the Rt. 20 overpass
14. Corner of Bauscher and Garden
15. Corner of Pleasant and Miami
16. Demeter from Park Blvd to La Cresta, including the home on La Cresta at the end of Demeter
17. Hickory Hill: turn north off Deming, above – you can't miss it!
18. 1018 S. Chicago and several other homes in that block
19. 1113-1115 South Carroll
20. 1211 La Cresta
21. 1104 North Benson and several other homes in that block
22. Park Blvd near the intersection of Park and Stover, on the east side (grey house with a flag pole in the front yard)
23. 1326 Monticello Lane (south off Empire and then west off Carriage Lane) – also impressive because you can also see all the backyard lighting from Empire)



24. Woodside Drive at the corner of Woodside Drive and Woodside Court, and several homes on Woodside Court
25. Evelyn Street between Blackhawk and Walnut
26. Highland Drive
27. Lincoln Blvd
28. Stephenson Street
29. Burchard Avenue, including a great brick house across from the Freeport Art Museum
30. The Leonard C. Ferguson Cancer Center at FHN Memorial Hospital (McKinley St. side)
31. Krape Park, through the main entrance off Empire and around the loop by the Koenig Amphitheatre (aka, the band shell)
32. Downtown Freeport!
33. Many churches have nice outdoor lighted displays, and those with beautiful stained glass windows may host evening holiday services that light up the windows from the inside
34. 56 Highview Court in Orangeville
35. Scioto Mills – no address needed as you'll see it right away when you get into town

### **The week ahead...**

This Sunday, December 21<sup>st</sup> is the annual Freeport Community Luminaria Night at 5:00 p.m. along Stephenson Street and Lincoln Blvd. We love the beauty of the soft light of luminaries as FHN joins the residents around FHN Memorial Hospital in the annual lighting of the luminarias. It's always a quiet, peaceful-feeling display amidst all the busy activities of the holiday season.



We're also looking forward to continuing to enjoy the FHN Community Festival of Trees at the Freeport Public Library 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 28<sup>th</sup> and whether or not you're voting, enjoying the trees is a favorite community pastime during the holiday season – and you can also check out holiday-themed books!

If you are looking for something to do this week or any week, visit the Greater Freeport Partnership website at [www.greaterfreeport.com](http://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](http://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 Tim Connors visiting about events at Freeport Martial Arts with owner and head instructor John Garvens, a Freeport high school graduate, and his friend Kate. The interview, which first aired the day before yesterday on Tuesday, is available online and can be listened to anytime.



Next Tuesday, we replay a timeless interview from last year's holiday season as FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Becky Connors visits with LaFrancine Baker about Kwanzaa, which begins on Friday, December 26<sup>th</sup> and continues through January 1<sup>st</sup>. Kwanzaa is an annual celebration of African-American culture that is based on African harvest festival traditions from various parts of West, East, and Southeast Africa. Their conversation will post at noon on Tuesday, December 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.

### **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](http://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](http://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**

## What's Going on in Stephenson County?

**Subscribe to  
our weekly  
event guide!**



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