



**27 February
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. Thanks for your support!

Greater Freeport Partnership honors achievements at annual dinner

The Greater Freeport Partnership announced the winners of its annual awards last Thursday, February 20th at the Masonic Event Center. The annual awards program recognizes outstanding individuals and businesses that have significantly contributed to the community. Ten businesses and individuals were honored.

The LeBaron Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Alan Wenzel who has educated students at Highland Community College for nearly four decades and co-created the Highland Leadership Institute for residents in Stephenson and Jo Daviess County to encourage community leadership. Alan is also an important part of FREEPD, including his role as one of our presenters and in-depth interviewers. We're proud of you, Alan – congratulations!

The Economic Achievement Award was awarded to the Freeport Arts Museum Arts Plaza, a downtown cornerstone welcoming more than 20,000 people last year for a wide variety of community events. Hughes Recruiting & Consulting was recognized as Business of the Year, which celebrated significant positive growth in 2024.

The Start-up of the Year award went to La Patrona Cantina & Grill, where a long-vacant space has been turned into a bustling hub for activity and delicious food, and the Manufacturer of the Year award went to Snak King, which employs 450 people in Stephenson County making high-quality food products.

Patty Monks was named Ambassador of the Year and recognized for her infectious enthusiasm, the Rising Star Award was presented to Mady Clark for help in shaping the future of downtown Freeport, and Mark Miller was named Volunteer of the Year for his many contributions to the City, including playing an instrumental role in transforming the Children's Hands-on Museum of Northwest Illinois from a traveling museum to a permanent location

The Not-for-Profit of the Year award went to Hope WINS, which works with families to provide the tools they need for success and Eats & Beats received the Tourism Achievement award for their popular two-day event that brings non-profit organizations together to sell food that allow them to raise much-needed funds.

You can read much more about the many accomplishments of these businesses and individuals in all they do and bring to the Freeport area and find a photo of the winners at the Greater Freeport Partnership website at www.greaterfreeport.com. Thanks and congratulations to all!



From left to right: Front Row: Andrea Schultz Winter, Partnership executive director; Carolyn Mitchell & Vanessa Hughes, Hughes Recruiting & Consulting; Linsey McDanel, Hope WINS; Claudia Paloma, La Patrona Cantina & Grill; Mary Moon, Snak King; Mady Clark; Jessica Modica, Freeport Art Musueum; Kristine Bradbury, Snak King. Back Row: Brian Babcock, Eats & Beats; Alan Wenzel; Mark Miller; Jerry Barthel, Brandon Riggle, and Travis Cox, Snak King. Not pictured: Patty Monks, Ambassador of the Year. Photo credit: Kristia Hord

Freeport acquires new snow equipment

During the most recent heavy snowstorm, the Street Department had a 2004 snow plow break during routine usage. This particular unit had failed numerous times even as City mechanics worked many times to repair the plow between snow events. However, the recent storm confirmed that it was too damaged to be repaired any further. The City Council approved the emergency procurement of a snow plow from Monroe Truck for \$11,598 which was approved by Council.

During the same storm, the City's only utility salt-spreading truck was in an accident that rendered its seven-year-old equipment beyond repair. The Council approved a further \$10,223 purchase from Monroe Truck to replace it.

Trash and bulk item collection

Residents who live within the city limits of Freeport are reminded that they can now bring trash and bulk items for disposal to the Freeport Transfer Station located at 2133 S. Walnut Road from 8:00 – 11:00 a.m. the first Saturday of every month. This month, that will be this Saturday, March 1st.

ID's are required for verification of residency. Tires, hazardous waste such as paint and oils, TVs, computers, or other electronics **are not accepted**. Events for the collection of items not accepted on these Saturdays will be organized later in the year. The City thanks Gill's Freeport Disposal for partnering in this landmark initiative.

HCC hosts *Eat the Neighborhood* presentation

Next Tuesday, March 4th is the next presentation in the One Book One Freeport community program. From 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., Highland Community College will host *Eat the Neighborhood: edible wild plants and mushrooms in your own backyard* presented by Dave Odd in Room 201 in the Student Conference Center. Join the conversation to hear all about the edibles you can find in your backyard and other unexpected places as well as how you can eat them!

Odd (at right) has been a forager his whole life and a professional forager since 2009. For over a decade he has conducted *Eat the Neighborhood* foraging tours and presentations teaching anyone who wants to learn about the edible and medicinal plants and mushrooms right in their own neighborhoods. He can identify over 3,000 species of edible and medicinal plants and loves to share that knowledge with laypeople. He is the owner of Odd Produce near Chicago.



No registration necessary for this free program, which thanks to the College will also be available via Zoom at <https://highland.zoom.us/j/87878713892?pwd=xrh9xMpmFCHAWfICMICjLubpd195Op.1>

The book selected for this year's One Book One Freeport community reading program is *Dandelion Wine* by famed author Ray Bradbury, recounts the story of his boyhood in Green Town -- which is actually Waukegan, Illinois -- in which he learns about love, life, mysteries, and death.

Black History Month at Freeport High School

As Black History Month draws to a close, FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host visited with LaKinda Brown, Paraprofessional at Freeport High School, about how the school has been commemorating the month. Tim and LaKinda, please tell us more!

(interview clip)

Thank you both!

***Journey to Freedom: Illinois' Underground Railroad* exhibit opens at Freeport Public Library**

Next Thursday, March 6th, head to the Freeport Public Library at 4:00 p.m. for the opening reception of *Journey to Freedom: Illinois' Underground Railroad*. This new museum-quality exhibit highlights the courageous stories of freedom seekers and the multi-racial conductors who assisted them on The Underground Railroad in Illinois.

Looking for Lincoln Program Manager Heather Freezor will present opening remarks at 5:00 to provide details on the years-long journey it took to bring this historic exhibit to life. The opening reception will continue until 6:00 p.m. that evening and then continue to be available for the public to enjoy during the exhibit's stay at the Library. Refreshments are provided by the Freeport Public Library Foundation.

Looking for Lincoln is the coordinating entity for the 43-county Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area which works in partnership with the Lincoln Home National Historic Site to tell the story of Lincoln's almost 30 years in Illinois in communities where Lincoln worked, traveled, and lived.

Reminder: Find out how to save on utility bills

Also next Thursday, March 6th, don't forget that you can learn how you may be able to save money on your utility bills in a presentation at the Freeport Public Library from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Participants will be able to speak one-on-one with a counselor from the Citizens Utility Board, known by the acronym CUB, for a personalized analysis of their bills. Information will also be available on solar and electrification programs, rebates for energy saving programs, strategies for reducing energy costs through efficiency programs, and do-it-yourself solutions for home-owners, how to spot unnecessary charges on gas and electric bills, and how to register for income-qualified financial assistance programs.

Appointment spaces are limited so register early at www.citizensutilityboard.org – click on “events” and then “March 6” to find the Freeport event. Please note that the address on the website is incorrect as the event will be held at the Freeport Public Library in Freeport, and be sure to bring copies of recent utility bills with you.

The Illinois General Assembly created the Citizens Utility Board in 1983 following local referendums that showed overwhelming support for the creation of an advocate for utility customers. The CUB Act gave the nonprofit, nonpartisan group the mission to fight for the rights of customers of investor-owned electric, gas and telecom utilities across Illinois. The event is hosted by Freeport's Environmental Study Group, and State Representative John Cabello.

State speech finalists

Our area was well represented this past weekend at the State finals speech competition in Peoria with six contestants earning a trip. Freeport High School students Mya Ortiz, Will Scudder, Asher Kittoe and Angela Gautam all carried the Pretzels banner to the finals, while Pearl City students Natalie Greene and Kaitlyn Christensen also earned a trip to compete at the highest level in the State.

Overall, Freeport finished 18th in the State in the finals, with Ortiz bringing home fourth and fifth place finishes, while Scudder,, Kittoe and Gautam all finished in the top 20. Speech events are not separated by size of the school for competition. Congratulations, finalists!

Seminar to become a Certified Food Protection Manager

On Tuesday, March 4th, the University of Illinois Extension will offer a certification course for the position of Certified Food Protection Manager from 9:00 to 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 4th and from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Friday, March 7th at the Stephenson County Farm Bureau in Freeport.

Illinois requires retail food businesses to have a person at their establishment designated as a Certified Food Protection Manager who has obtained certification through the American National Standards Institute. These Managers have specialized training regarding safe handling, preparation, and storage of food to help prevent foodborne illnesses. The certification is valid for five years from the date it is acquired.

There is a \$125 fee to cover the purchase of the workbook, educational materials, and the examination, and participants must attend the full two-day training to be eligible to take the exam. Pre-registration is required and can be done by contacting the U of I Extension at 815-235-4125 or online at

<https://extension.illinois.edu/news-releases/certified-food-protection-manager-training-offered>

The week ahead...

In looking ahead, don't forget that the Senior Resource Center in Freeport is providing free federal and state 1040 tax counseling, preparation, and filing services for low and middle-income senior taxpayers 60 years and older residing in Stephenson and Jo Daviess counties as well as adults with disabilities. This service is offered through April 15, 2025. Appointments are required and can be scheduled to be held at the Center by calling 815-235-9777. That's 815-235-9777.

You can also vote early for the April elections for all city and village races in the lower level of the Stewart Centre, 50 West Douglas Street in Freeport from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Film lovers are probably looking forward to the Academy Awards this Sunday and in case you haven't yet seen all the movies nominated for Best Picture, the Lindo Theatre will be showing five of the nominated films this Saturday so you can watch them all in one day! They showed the other five last Saturday so everyone would have a chance to see all ten on the big screen before the Awards. Then next Wednesday, March 5th, is the date for the next film in the Select Pix Classic Film Series at the Lindo Theatre in Freeport. *Erin Brockovich*, the 2000 film starring Julia Roberts as a single mom who discovers a corporate cover-up of a toxic chemical spill, will air at 1:00 and 7:00 p.m.. Both showings will be followed by a discussion about the movie with Ed Finch and Alan Wenzel, hosts of this popular film series now in its 15th year.

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 in the print version of this newscast if you'd like to sign up that way.



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, if you haven't already done so be sure to listen to this week's in-depth interview that aired on Tuesday featuring FREEPOD host Alan Wenzel chatting with Zoe Huspen of the CUB Citizens Utility Board about the workshop in Freeport coming up next Thursday that will offer ways to save on utility bills.

Next week, tune in as FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Tim Connors visits with John Voelz about easy ways for elderly or physically challenged folks to stay in shape. Their conversation will post at noon on Tuesday, March 4th.

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

As always, we remind you that 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.

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