



**11 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) 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.

Winter is here!



Snowfall isn't always news, but we made news in Freeport over the last week or so! According to measurements at the Rockford Airport, this is the quickest start to the snowfall season since reliable records began to be kept in 1905! We have already exceeded the amount of snow we received all last winter with over 15 inches...and counting.

Looks like we won't have to worry about a white Christmas this year!

Strategic Plan and Budget approved for Freeport

The Freeport City Council recently approved the City's Strategic Plan for 2026 through 2028 and the budget for fiscal year 2026.

The City worked with a consultant to create a Strategic Vision that builds on previous plans and progress while providing the framework for 2026 to 2028. The main priority areas include focusing on the importance of a Safe and Inclusive Community, Neighborhoods and Housing, Quality Communications and Engagement, a Reliable and Strong Infrastructure, Economic Development and Land Use, Responsive and Efficient Government, a Connected and Accessible Community, Strong Public and Private Partnerships, and Vibrant Arts and Culture Experiences.

Major highlights of the 2026 budget include \$5.6 million for street projects, the improvement of City facilities such as a Public Works auxiliary building and Central Fire Station, further progress on public water Well #12, and important additions like adding a second nuisance inspector to the staff.

Freeport has a Sister City!

In other City news, the City of Freeport has ceremoniously passed a resolution to become Sister Cities with Lititz, Pennsylvania to celebrate shared heritage and open new doors for cultural, educational, and tourism exchange.

The initiative is rooted in a shared German-American legacy and appreciation and affection for the pretzel. The resolution will be considered by the Borough of Lititz on December 23rd where it is also expected to be approved.

In commenting about the arrangement, Freeport City Mayor Jodi Miller said, "Freeport has embraced the image of Pretzel City, USA for over a century. We are excited to work with Lititz, PA and would like to thank Freeport community advocate Tim Connors for helping to bring this great idea to fruition."

Lititz Mayor Timothy R. Snyder said, "The rich traditions in Freeport and Lititz are enhanced by becoming sister cities. Our history with pretzels gives our communities a common bond. We look forward to sharing ideas and experiences that will benefit both our communities."

The sister city idea originated from Freeport resident Tim Connors and TimBeck2 and FREEPOD host after he discovered pretzel memorabilia that designated Lititz, PA as the "home of the pretzel."

Said Connors, "I saw that tagline and had to know more because Freeport is the home of the Pretzels! I cold-called Mayor Snyder to learn more. Freeport and Lititz are the perfect fit for sister cities with hard-working people surrounded by rich history, and more importantly, a rich tradition of pretzels. I am excited about this friendship growing through the years."

Lititz is home to the first commercial pretzel bakery in America, while Freeport is affectionately known as Pretzel City USA in both reputation and through its high school mascot. Both communities boast active Main Street programs, historic architecture, and a commitment to fostering local pride and economic vitality. In the resolution, both cities will encourage practical exchanges in business, arts, culture, and tourism. Plans are underway to explore cross-promotional events, heritage tours, and

collaborative branding efforts that highlight the unique appeal of each destination.



From left, Freeport Mayor Jodi Miller, Lititz Mayor Timothy R. Snyder, and Freeport resident and FREEPOD host Tim Connors.

Park District news



A graphic for Winter Equipment Rental featuring a snowy landscape with evergreen trees and the text 'Winter EQUIPMENT RENTAL' in a stylized font. The Freeport Park District logo is in the top right corner.

Winter Equipment Rental	Daily Fee	Weekend Fee	Sizes Available
Cross Country Skis, Pole and Boots	\$10	\$20	Universal Men Women Children
Poles			4'2" - 6'5"
Boots			Men 8-14 Women 5-13 Youth 1-Up
Snowshoes	\$5	\$12	Universal
Ice Skates - 3 Adjustable Sizes	\$5	\$12	Youth 10-13 Boys 1-4 Boys/Men 5-8

Winter has certainly arrived and fresh air and outdoor fun await you on the groomed trails at Oakdale Nature Preserve Park! In addition to hiking, the trails at Oakdale are maintained for snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and fat tire biking. No gear? No problem! Gear rentals are available at very reasonable prices at the Administration Center in Read Park Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. For more information, visit the Freeport Park District website at freeportparkdistrict.org

(<https://freeportparkdistrict.org/winter-activities/>)

Santa is also coming to Krape Park tomorrow night, Friday, December 12th, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. He'll be welcoming children at the building close to the boat dock to celebrate the holidays with a free event including hot chocolate, a holiday craft, photos with him, and lots of Christmas spirit.

The Park District has also unveiled a new website that puts everyone just one click away from all the recreation and fun the Park District has to offer. From registering for programs to finding your nearest park, everything you need is at your fingertips as you discover activities, events, and resources for you and your family. You can also sign up to receive timely updates on park happenings. We're sure everyone will enjoy learning more about our wonderful Park District and all the enjoyment it brings to the Freeport area!



Hanukkah begins this weekend

This year Hanukkah, also known as the Festival of Lights, begins this Sunday evening, December 14th, and goes through the following Monday, December 22nd. We wanted to learn a little more about this important holiday so FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Tim Connors had a chat with Dr. Stephen Geller of Ohave Sholom at Temple Beth-El in Rockford.

(audio clip)

Thank you, Dr. Geller and Tim!

Community Foundation of Northern Illinois is champion sponsor for Dolly Parton reading project

The United Way has announced that the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois is once again the Stephenson County Champion sponsor for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program. Since United Way of Northwest Illinois became the affiliate for our Stephenson County Imagination Library in 2016, the Foundation and their Donor Funds like the Ralph A. & Mildred Johnson Fund have contributed over \$159,000 to the program. This has allowed the United Way to send over 162,500 books to children in Stephenson County since 2016.

Thank you, Community Foundation of Northern Illinois, for sharing your passion for literacy and early childhood development.

Get Fit registration opens



It's the time of year that many of us begin to think about getting a fresh start to the new year, and the FHN Get Fit program is here to help! Signup for FHN Get Fit 2026 starts next Monday, December 15th.

The program kicks off with FREE health screenings in mid-January and runs through April. It's all free, and offers a fun way to start building healthy habits. Learn more and register by searching on "Get Fit 2026" at www.fhn.org or click on (<https://www.fhn.org/getfit.asp>).

Salvation Army Angel Walk

The Christmas spirit will come alive beginning next Monday, December 15th at the Salvation Army in Freeport with the Angel Walk toy program. For three days, parents who previously have registered with the agency will be able to receive toys for their kids. All of the toys have been donated and they are free to parents who otherwise may not be able to give any to their families at Christmas. Parents are limited to three toys per child and last year more than 700 toys were given away. Toys for the Angel Walk can still be dropped off at the Salvation Army at 106 West Exchange Street in Freeport.

Tech tips for seniors

The next and final class in the Tech Tips for Seniors program at the Senior Resource Center in Freeport will be held next Wednesday, December 17th from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. at the Center and will teach attendees how to manage their digital photos and understand cloud storage opportunities. The session

is free but space is limited and advance registration is required. To register, call the Senior Resource Center at 815-235-9777 or email the Center at awalker@srcntr.org and please bring your own devices.

The week ahead...

As we look at the week ahead, the therapy dogs will be at the Freeport Public Library this Saturday, December 13th from 11:00 a.m. for Paws to Read to listen to children read to them, and they're hoping to hear a lot of holiday stories! Later in the day, in addition to coming to Krape Park tomorrow night as we mentioned earlier, Santa Claus will be visiting the Library from 2:00 to 2:30 to read Christmas stories to children and listen to Christmas wish lists.

We're also reminding children that they can still post their wish-list letters to Santa at mailboxes at the Freeport Public Library children's desk or the lobbies of FHN locations in Freeport including Burchard Hills, Highland View Drive, and FHN Memorial Hospital. A template for the letters to make it easy for young writers can be downloaded from the FHN website at www.fhn.org – just search on “letter to Santa” or click on <https://www.fhn.org/docs/SantaLetter.pdf>. Letters must be received by Sunday, December 14th to allow time for Santa to respond and send a holiday craft to letter writers in time for Christmas.

A template for a letter to Santa. It features a cartoon illustration of Santa Claus's head in the top right corner. The text on the form says: "Dear Santa,", "My name is _____", "I am _____ years old. I am a: _____ boy _____ girl", "I would like it if you could bring me: _____", "Thank you and Merry Christmas!", and "PARENTS - PLEASE COMPLETE THE FORM BELOW:". Below this, there are lines for "Parent Name:", "Address:", "City:", "State:", "Zip:", and "Child's Name:". At the bottom, there is a small note: "Write a letter to Santa and get a reply letter and a holiday craft. Your child's letter to Santa can be dropped off at Santa's mailbox at the Freeport Public Library or the lobbies of FHN Memorial Hospital, FHN Family Healthcare Center - Burchard Hills, or FHN Family Healthcare Center - Highland View Drive."

If you've been appreciating the beautiful holiday decorations in downtown Freeport, remember that you can support the effort to purchase and maintain them for all of us to enjoy every year and have a great time too by attending the fundraiser Christmas Wizards Trans-Siberian Tribute concert this Saturday, December 13th at 6:00 p.m. at the Masonic Temple. Tickets are still available for the event, which is

presented by the Greater Freeport Partnership and range from \$25 to \$50. Get yours online through three sources at links in the print version of this episode of FREEPOD.

<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>

We want to end by reminding everyone that there have been some great nighttime skywatching opportunities recently, including being able to check out the Northern Lights that are usually only visible much further north. There more highlights – pun intended – to come yet in December, including meteor showers, stunning star views, and more. We found a fun video from NASA on sky-watching in December on YouTube and have included a link in the print version of this newsletter for you and your family to enjoy -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYYW90WrWqU> -- or you can just head to YouTube and search on “NASA skywatching tips for December 2025.”

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 host Alan Wenzel chatted with local history author Ed Finch and Sharon Welton, director of the Stephenson County Historical Society Museum about Charles Guiteau, who was born in Freeport in 1841 and is probably best known for shooting President James Garfield in 1881, which led to the President’s death shortly thereafter. His story unfolds in the new limited series *Death by Lightning* which we’ve heard many of you have been watching on Netflix. The interview, which first aired the day before yesterday on Tuesday, is available online and can be listened to anytime.

Next Tuesday, FREEPOD and TimBeck2 host Tim Connors hosts a conversation about events at Freeport Martial Arts with owner and head instructor John Garvens, a Freeport high school graduate, and his friend Kate. Their conversation will post at noon on Tuesday, December 16th 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, WNII 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



To find 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 with this QR code if you prefer.

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 with the QR at the right.

Subscribe to City of Freeport News



Join our list of subscribers and get City of Freeport's monthly e-newsletters and other important and timely updates sent directly to your e-mail using this QR code.