



Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Lynn Weaver...

And I'm Alan Wenzel...

In this week's episode, a Polo school board member dies in a golf-cart crash...

Student work goes on display at the Highland gallery...

And HCC hosts a guest speaker for Constitution Day to discuss the beleaguered 4th Amendment.

This is Freepod for September 10th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

POLO SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER DIES IN GOLF-CART CRASH

The Polo community is mourning the death of a local school board member following a golf cart crash early Thursday morning.

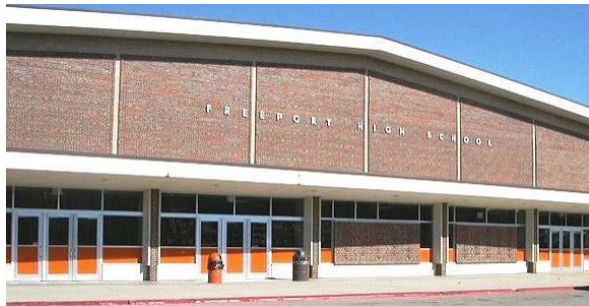
The Ogle County Sheriff's Office says 46-year-old Richard "Rick" Knutson was driving a golf cart on Goose Hollow Road near Summer Hill Road shortly after one a.m. September 3rd.

Investigators say the cart left the roadway, entered a ditch and struck a concrete culvert. Knutson was ejected and later died at a Dixon hospital. Knutson had served on the Polo Community Unit School District Board of Education since 2021. Before joining the board, he served as a naval officer and was a graduate of Polo Community High School.



Superintendent Kelly Mandrell called Knutson's commitment to service an incredible asset to the school district, community and country.

Counseling and support services are being made available to Polo students and staff. The crash remains under investigation.



FHS CELEBRATES 100 YEARS

A century of Pretzel Pride will be celebrated this weekend as Freeport High School marks the 100th anniversary of its historic building.

The current high school opened in 1926, and the district estimates roughly 26-thousand students have graduated from FHS since the move to the Moseley Street campus.

A community centennial celebration will be held Saturday, September 12th, from 11 until 3 on the high school's Moseley Street lawn.

The theme is "One Century, One Community, One Pretzel."

The celebration will include guided tours of the historic building, live music, historical speakers and displays, food trucks and other activities.

The school's bell tower is also being illuminated in orange each evening as part of the centennial celebration. Students, alumni, former staff and the entire Freeport community are invited to take part.

For more information, you can listen to the interview conducted by Freepod host Tim Connors. Tim spoke to principal Sarah Hasken and Social Studies chair Whitney Eberle about the events planned for this historic event. You can find that interview on our website, or anywhere you get your podcasts.

ELIZABETH WOMAN NAMED TO ILLINOIS 4-H HALL OF FAME

A longtime Jo Daviess County 4-H volunteer is being honored for decades of service to local youth.

Karen Koester of Elizabeth has been inducted into the 2026 Illinois 4-H Hall of Fame. Koester has spent decades mentoring young people, with much of her work focused on livestock education. She has served as a beef superintendent and has also judged and supervised general 4-H projects.

Koester says she volunteers because of the leadership and support she received from 4-H volunteers when she was younger.

Illinois 4-H officials say the Hall of Fame recognizes volunteers who have demonstrated exemplary service and made a lasting impact on young people.

Koester was among this year's honorees recognized during the Illinois State Fair.



JO DAVIESS COUNTY DEDICATES 911 CENTER TO HONOR LONGTIME CHAIRMAN



Jo Daviess County is honoring a longtime leader who helped modernize the county's emergency communications system.

The county has officially named its 911 facility the William D. Kimball Communications Center.

Bill Kimball joined the county's Emergency Telephone System Board in 2012 and served as chairman from 2014 through 2025.

During his tenure, Jo Daviess County transitioned to Next Generation 911, introduced Text-to-911 and moved to the STARCOM21 digital radio system, along with other major technology upgrades.

County officials credit Kimball's leadership with helping guide years of planning and investment in emergency

communications.

The dedication permanently connects his name with the 911 system he helped strengthen.

SAVANNA ARMY DEPOT ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANUP REMAINS ACTIVE

More than 25 years after the Savanna Army Depot closed, environmental cleanup work at the sprawling former military installation remains active.

The U.S. Army continues to address contamination left by decades of ammunition storage, testing and disposal at the 13-thousand-acre property in Carroll and Jo Daviess counties.



The EPA says past operations contaminated soil, groundwater, surface water and sediment.

Much of the cleanup has already been completed, but monitoring and other environmental work continue, including an investigation into PFAS contamination in one area.

Federal records estimate nearly 78-million dollars in additional environmental costs at Savanna beginning in fiscal year 2026.

The Army remains responsible for the cleanup, with oversight from state and federal environmental agencies.



FREE KIDNEY SCREENING OFFERED AT THE Y

Free kidney health screenings are coming to Freeport next week. The National Kidney Foundation of Illinois will bring its Kidney-Mobile to the Family YMCA of Northwest Illinois on Tuesday, September 15th, from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m.

The free screening takes about 45 minutes and includes blood pressure, blood glucose, body mass index and urine testing to identify possible signs of kidney disease.

Participants can also privately discuss their results with a medical professional.

No appointment is required, although advance registration is available through the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois.

Free fresh produce will also be available during the event.

POOL AND PICKLEBALL ARE BACK AT THE Y

Swimmers and pickleball players are back in action at the Family YMCA of Northwest Illinois in Freeport.

The YMCA says its swimming pool reopened September first following a temporary



closure, while its pickleball courts have also received an upgrade.

The courts have been freshly varnished and newly lined and are once again ready for play.

The YMCA's six-lane, 25-meter pool is used for lap swimming, swim lessons, open swimming and group fitness programs.

The Family YMCA is located at 2998 West Pearl City Road on the Highland Community College campus in Freeport.



HCC YOUTH CHOIR READIES FOR FIRST REHEARSAL

Young singers from across Northwest Illinois are invited to join the Highland Youth Choir this fall.

The choir is open to students in second through 12th grade, and no audition is required.

The first rehearsal is Monday, September 14th, from 4:15 to 5 p.m. in Room F-10 of the Ferguson Fine Arts Center at Highland Community College in Freeport.

The program gives young performers an opportunity to develop their vocal skills while singing and performing with other students.

Anyone interested in participating is asked to register before the first rehearsal. You can find the link here: <https://form.fillout.com/t/kPHmnhnfRCus>

STUDENT WORK ON DISPLAY AT HCC GALLERY

Artwork created by current and former Highland Community College students is now on display in Freeport.

"Student Work Selections" opened September 7th at the Highland Gallery and will remain on display through October 5th.

The exhibition features work by students from Highland's Visual Arts program and gives the public an opportunity to see some of the creative work being produced at the college.

Highland says its gallery provides students with opportunities to exhibit their work while giving the community greater access to original art.

The Highland Gallery is located in the west wing of the Ferguson Fine Arts Center on Highland's Freeport campus.

The exhibition runs through October 5th.





FREEPORT PARK DISTRICT HOSTS LEGO COMPETITION

LEGO builders are being challenged to put their creativity to work for the Freeport Park District.

The district is holding a LEGO Challenge featuring creations inspired by parks and recreation. Entries can depict everything from playgrounds and sports fields to wildlife and nature scenes.

Completed projects must be no larger than 12 inches in any direction and delivered to the Park District Administration Center by September 11th. Registration costs ten dollars.

Entries will then be displayed from September 14th through October 2nd for public voting.

The grand-prize winner receives a 50-dollar Park District gift certificate, with Krape Park Family Fun Packs awarded to runners-up.

JO-CARROLL RECYCLING EVENT

Northwest Illinois residents will have a chance to safely dispose of electronics, tires, appliances and other unwanted items later this month.

The Jo-Carroll Solid Waste Agency will hold a recycling collection Saturday, September 26th, from nine until noon at the Carroll County Highway Department in Mount Carroll.

Many items can be dropped off for free, including small electronics, household appliances, scrap metal, lead-acid batteries and unwanted prescription medications.



Fees apply for tires, televisions and computer screens, large appliances, household recyclables, batteries and fluorescent bulbs.

Organizers say paper shredding, paint and household hazardous waste will NOT be accepted.

The event is open to Northwest Illinois residents and businesses.



IFT ASKS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA SETTLEMENT MONEY TO GO TOWARDS SCHOOLS

The Illinois Federation of Teachers wants hundreds of millions of dollars from a settlement with Meta directed toward the state's public schools.

Illinois is set to receive up to 768-million dollars over ten years from a multi-state settlement alleging Facebook and Instagram contributed to social media addiction among young people.

The settlement calls for Illinois' share to support youth mental health and online safety programs.

The teachers' union argues schools are an ideal place to provide those services while also addressing widespread education funding shortages.

Governor JB Pritzker, however, has cautioned against using the one-time windfall to cover ongoing school expenses.

DIESEL PRICES HIT A NEW RECORD HIGH

Record-high diesel prices are adding another expense for Northwest Illinois farmers just as harvest season approaches.

AAA says the national average has climbed to about five-dollars-and-90-cents a gallon, while diesel in Illinois is averaging roughly five-89 — more than two dollars a gallon higher than a year ago.



That matters across Northwest Illinois, where diesel powers combines, tractors and trucks used to harvest and transport corn and soybeans.

University of Illinois agricultural economists say higher fuel costs are squeezing already-thin farm margins, with the impact expected to become especially noticeable during harvest.

And those higher transportation costs could eventually contribute to higher prices throughout the food supply chain.



FREEPORT FIRE HOSTING 25TH ANNIVERSARY CEREMONY FOR 9/11

The Freeport Fire Department is inviting the community to gather Friday morning to mark the 25th anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks.

A remembrance ceremony will begin promptly at 8:30 a.m. September 11th at Freeport's Central Fire Station, located at 1650 South Walnut Avenue.

The observance will remember the nearly three-thousand people killed in the 2001 attacks, including hundreds of firefighters, police officers and other first responders.

Because parking at the fire station is limited, attendees who are able are asked to park across the street in the Slumberland parking lot and walk to the ceremony.

LENA FALL FESTIVAL RETURNS

One of Northwest Illinois' longest-running community celebrations returns to Lena this weekend.

The Lena Lions Club will hold its 75th annual Fall Festival Friday and Saturday in downtown Lena. Known as the "Cadillac of Small Town Festivals," the celebration will feature Skinner Amusements carnival rides, merchandise bingo, the Lions Club's famous Ham Stand, pork chops on a stick and other food and vendors.



Saturday's parade steps off at noon, and free entertainment is planned both nights, including The StingRays Saturday evening.

The Lena Lions Fall Festival runs Friday and Saturday, September 11th and 12th.



Senior Resource Center

SRC BRINGS BACK BETTER BALANCE & STRENGTH FOR OLDER ADULTS

A popular fitness program for older adults is returning to Freeport this fall.

The Senior Resource Center is again partnering with Pathway Physical Therapy for its six-week “Better Balance and Strength” program.

Physical therapists lead participants through gentle exercises designed to improve strength, flexibility and mobility, while helping reduce the risk of falls.

Classes will be held Tuesdays from September 22nd through October 27th, from 1 until 1:45 p.m. at the Senior Resource Center on East Stephenson Street.

The six-week session costs 45 dollars, and all fitness levels are welcome.

Space is limited. Registration is available by calling the Senior Resource Center at 815-235-9777.

MEET REMARKABLE WOMEN OF WORLD WAR I

Four remarkable women from the World War One era will come to life during a special historical program in Freeport.

The Senior Resource Center will host the Galena-based reenactment group Women of Courage and Commitment on Tuesday, September 15th.

Performers will portray activist Emma Goldman, British nurse Edith Cavell, archaeologist and Middle East expert Gertrude Bell, and the mysterious dancer accused of espionage, Mata Hari.

The program uses historical reenactment and researched storytelling to explore the choices and challenges faced by each woman during the war.

The presentation begins at 2 p.m. at the Senior Resource Center in Freeport. Admission is free, but seating is limited and advance registration is encouraged.



CONSTITUTION DAY PRESENTATION AT HCC LIBRARY

Highland Community College will mark Constitution Day with a discussion about how a centuries-old constitutional protection applies — or sometimes doesn't apply — to our digital lives.

The Clarence Mitchell Library will host “The Embattled Fourth Amendment” at 1 p.m. Wednesday, September 16th.

Guest speaker Dorothea Salo of the University of Wisconsin-Madison will examine how the Fourth Amendment protects Americans against unreasonable government searches, but may not provide the same protections for the enormous amounts of digital information collected in everyday life.

Salo has researched privacy surrounding the collection of student data and teaches information security and information ethics.

The program will explore who collects our digital information, how it can be used, the risks that creates, and steps people can take to better protect their privacy.

The event is free and open to the public.

IN CLOSING

Before we go, a quick programming note. If you'd rather read the news than listen to it, we've got you covered. Every week, we post a complete written version of this newscast on our website at freepod.org. It's a great way to catch up on local news at your own pace or revisit a story you want to read in more detail.

And remember, podcasts are available whenever it's convenient for you. While new episodes are released every Thursday at noon, you can listen anytime—whether you're driving to work, mowing the lawn, or relaxing at home. Subscribe wherever you get your podcasts, or visit freepod.org to listen and read whenever it works best for you.

And it's not just our newscasts either. Our interviews are available to listen to anytime as well, including this past week's interview. Freepod host Alan Wenzel spoke with Jeff Modica, manager of Albertus Airport. Jeff shared the airport's plans for their new improvements to the pilot and passenger lounges currently under construction.

We'd like to thank our community liaisons and reporters for providing pivotal content for our program, our partners at WNIJ in DeKalb for helping to share Freepod to a larger community, and the Media Studies department at Highland Community College for producing this podcast.

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This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.

