



Hello and welcome to FREEPOD. I'm Tim Connors...

And I'm Becky Connors...

In this week's episode, the Freeport School Board unanimously approves major staffing cuts...

Ogle County is getting new prairie land...

And opportunities to help clean up our community are here just in time.

This is Freepod for April 9th, 2026 and here is the news that you've been missing...

FSD BOARD UNANIMOUSLY APPROVES RIFS

At one of the most well attended Board meetings in recent history, the Freeport School District School Board unanimously approved the elimination of 54 employee positions for the coming school year.

As we've previously reported, the Board is attempting to close a projected \$11 million dollar budget shortfall. With these cuts, Board officials estimate that the district could save around \$5 million. When we spoke to Freeport Education Association President Kelly Everding previously, she noted that even with these cuts, a significant deficit is still projected; raising the possibility of this same situation happening again the next school year.

Among the positions being reduced are 32 individuals from the teaching side and 22 from support staff. Included in the cuts are resource coordinators, bus monitors, librarians, elementary school reading and math support specialists, AVID coordinators, a business and a computers teacher, and the high school's athletic director.

Representatives from the Freeport Education Association said that they are concerned with how these cuts will harm students both now and in the future, as well as how these cuts will shift even more work on to an already strained teaching pool.

Individuals who are being cut are being honorably dismissed, which gives them the opportunity to apply for any open positions in the district.

Freeport School Board President Martha Furst told us that these kinds of decisions are incredibly difficult, but not unique to Freeport. With major cuts from federal funds and increasing costs, school districts across the country are struggling to balance budgets; with some in the area even closing entire schools.

The Board must submit their proposal to the state Board of Education by April 15th. Employees who are let go will see their terms expire at the end of this school year.



DEININGER FLORAL IS RE-OPENING

A longtime local business that only recently announced their closure is coming back in Freeport.

Deininger Floral has announced they are officially reopening their doors, bringing fresh flowers, gifts, and familiar service back to the community.

The shop's previous owners announced the store's closure just a month ago, but its return is being welcomed by customers who have relied on Deininger Floral for generations of weddings, holidays, and special occasions.

The new owners say they're excited to once again serve Freeport and surrounding areas, offering floral arrangements for everything from everyday moments to major life events.

Community members are encouraged to stop in, support local, and welcome the business back.



CITY EMPLOYEES TRAINED ON UV WATER DISINFECTION



The City of Freeport is moving forward with a major \$60 million upgrade to its wastewater treatment plant — with a key focus on new ultraviolet, or UV, disinfection technology.

City officials say the project will replace outdated systems and shift away from traditional chlorination, eliminating harmful chemical byproducts and instead using UV light to disinfect wastewater before it's released.

The upgrade is designed to better protect the Pecatonica River, prevent untreated discharges, and improve overall environmental compliance.

Phase one also includes new headworks, improved treatment for stormwater, and updated lab equipment.

The project is funded primarily through a low-interest loan from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, with construction already underway and expected to take about three years.

FPD TO START CRACKING DOWN ON DISTRACTED DRIVING

The Freeport Police Department is stepping up enforcement this month for Distracted Driving Awareness Month.

Working with the Illinois Department of Transportation and Illinois State Police, officers will increase patrols throughout April targeting distracted driving violations.

Police say they'll be watching for texting, social media use, and other distractions behind the wheel.

Chief Jacquelyn Frausto says even a quick glance at a phone can have serious consequences and urges drivers to stay focused.

Officials remind motorists it's illegal in Illinois to use a handheld device while driving.

The campaign is funded through federal traffic safety dollars administered by IDOT.





CITY OF FREEPORT HAVING RIBBON CUTTING FOR NEW EV CHARGING STATION

The City of Freeport will celebrate a major step forward in electric vehicle infrastructure tomorrow.

A ribbon cutting is set for Friday, April 10th at 3 pm at State Avenue and Main Street, marking the completion of eight new downtown EV charging stations.

City officials say the project was funded by a \$320,000 grant through the Illinois EPA, along with additional support from ComEd.

The new Level 3 chargers are now active and visible on navigation maps, making it easier for travelers to plan stops in Freeport.

Before the project, only one public charger was available in the city.

INTERVIEW WITH STEPHENSON COUNTY ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER KRISTIN LOUE

As we reported a while back, the Stephenson County Animal Shelter is moving. To understand more about what precipitated this move, and how it will benefit our community, I spoke to Animal Control Administrator and Warden Kristin Loue. Here is that conversation.



SEVERSON DELLS GETS A NAME CHANGE

A well-known nature destination in northern Illinois is getting a new name.

Severson Dells Nature Center will soon be known as Wild Roots Nature Center, as the organization expands its reach.

Leaders say the new name reflects growth, including operations at both the Severson Dells Forest Preserve and a future site at the former Elliot Golf Course.

Starting July 1st, the locations will be called Wild Roots Nature Center at Severson Dells and Wild Roots Nature Center at Prairie's Edge.

Officials note the forest preserve itself will keep the Severson Dells name.

NATURAL LAND INSTITUTE SECURES LARGE PRAIRIE AREA FOR RESTORATION

The Natural Land Institute has expanded its conservation efforts in Ogle County with the purchase of nearly 150 acres near Davis Junction.

The land surrounds the Beach Cemetery Prairie Nature Preserve, considered one of the finest remaining examples of Illinois prairie — a landscape that now makes up less than one-tenth of one percent of its original 22 million acres.

The site also protects a historic settler cemetery dating back to the 1850s.

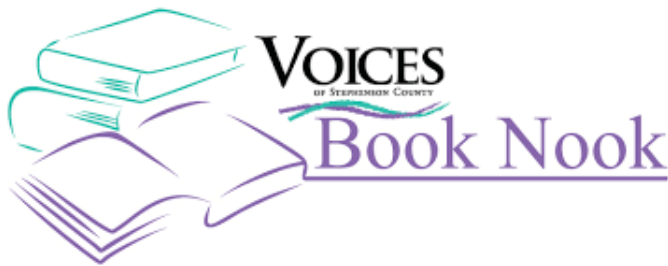
The purchase was funded through the sale of donated farmland and additional gifts.

Restoration work is already underway, with plans for regenerative agriculture and future prairie habitat.

The property will remain closed to the public for now.



VOICES BOOK NOOK HALF PRICE SALE



Voices of Stephenson County is hosting their spring half price book sale starting today.

The sale runs until April 18th at their Book Nook inside the Lincoln Mall. The shop is open from 10 am to 4 pm, Monday through Saturday, with later hours until 7 pm on Thursday.

Proceeds from the sale go to support Voices mission of supporting survivors of domestic and sexual violence in our community, including counseling and a shelter for temporary housing.

STATE BUSINESS LEADERS ASKING FOR MORE CHILD CARE FUNDING

Illinois business leaders are pushing for more funding to address the state's growing child care crisis.

A new report from ReadyNation Illinois estimates the issue is costing the state six-point-two billion dollars each year, as parents struggle to balance work and child care.

Closures of facilities are happening even as demand remains high, while rising operating costs are driving up prices for families.

Advocates say the lack of child care leads to missed work, reduced productivity, and even job loss for parents.

The group is backing Governor JB Pritzker's proposal to boost funding by \$55 million, while also calling for more federal support.





PRITZKER WANTS YEAR ROUND E-15 GASOLINE

Illinois Governor JB Pritzker is urging Congress to approve year-round sales of E15 gasoline — a blend of 15 percent ethanol and 85 percent gasoline.

In a letter to lawmakers, Pritzker says allowing permanent E15 use would lower fuel costs, boost domestic energy production, and strengthen rural economies by increasing demand for corn.

Federal rules currently restrict E15 sales in the summer due to smog concerns, forcing states like Illinois to rely on temporary waivers.

Pritzker says a long-term solution is needed, warning that uncertainty could drive gas prices even higher.

According to AAA, gas prices have now topped four dollars per gallon nationwide for the first time since 2022.

HIGHLAND HOSTS 53RD ANNUAL HIGH SCHOOL JURIED ART EXHIBIT

Highland Community College is hosting an opening reception for their 53rd Annual High School Juried Art Exhibit.

On April 15th, from 4:30 to 6 pm, the community is invited to come to the Ferguson Fine Arts Center on Highland’s campus and see works created by high school students living in Highland’s district.

Awards will be presented at 5:30 and the exhibit will remain open in the gallery through May 6th.



STEPHENSON COUNTY CLEAN UP



Stephenson County Clean-Up Week is underway and runs through April 12th — and there’s still time to get involved.

Residents across Stephenson County are encouraged to volunteer by picking up litter and helping clean designated areas throughout the area.

Free clean-up kits, including bags and gloves, are available at the Greater Freeport Partnership office on West Main Street, weekdays from 8 to 5.

Participants can also drop off filled trash bags at a designated area under the parking garage.

Organizers say the event is a great way for individuals, families, and groups to enjoy the outdoors while helping beautify the community.

To sign up for a time slot, please visit <https://signup.com/client/invitation2/secure/223187400/false#/invitation>.

FREEPORT'S COMMUNITY CLEAN UP DAY

While you're in the clean up mood, you can also participate in the city of Freeport's community clean up day on April 17th from 8 am to 12 pm.

Residents will meet at the intersection of Wilbur and Orin and materials such as garbage bags and gloves will be provided. However, participants are encouraged to bring their own bug spray, boots, and wipes.

Registration is not required, but is appreciated. To let the city know you plan on helping, please contact Randi Kohlbauer at (815) 396-3548.



Stephenson County 4-H



Area youth are invited to take part in a morning of hands-on learning later this month in Freeport.

Super Saturday is set for April 18th from 8:30 a.m. to noon at the Stephenson County Farm Bureau.



The event is open to all young people ages 5 to 18 — not just 4-H members — and features interactive sessions ranging from arts and food prep to science and community service.

Organizers say it's a great opportunity for kids to explore new interests, build confidence, and meet others.

The cost to attend is \$5.

To register, please visit <https://extension.illinois.edu/events/2026-04-18-stephenson-county-4-h-super-saturday>.

IN CLOSING...

As we wrap up this week's show, we'd like to remind you all to listen to this past week's interview. I spoke with the new director of the Freeport Public Library, Emily Schaub, about her plans for the library moving forward as well as her first impressions of our city.

This coming Tuesday, Alan Wenzel will share his interview with another new face in the community: Freeport Police Chief Jacquelyn Frausto. Chief Frausto shares her thoughts on the challenges and opportunities that she faces in her new role leading the city's police department. That interview will be available starting at noon on Tuesday, April 14th. You can find it, and all of our other interviews, on our website, www.freepod.org, or wherever you get your podcasts from.

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 Mass Communication department at Highland Community College for producing this podcast.

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This has been Freepod. Thank you for listening.



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