



**6 February
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 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!

Remembering Jane

We must begin today's podcast on a somber note, as the whole FREEPOD team is deeply saddened by the passing of Jane Lethlean, one of our board members and a valued contributor to this community journalism effort, on January 29th. As a true professional journalist, Jane wrote her own obituary. It can be read in its entirety on the Burke-Tubbs Funeral Homes website, but just to highlight a few of the things in her life that she obviously thought most important, she was proud of growing up in Apple River, and graduating from Warren High School and the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. She attended St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Warren and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Freeport

Jane wrote that she had a wonderful career in journalism, working for The Journal-Standard for more than 30 years and ending her career as a Communication Specialist at Highland Community College. She said that the best part of her career was the people she met along the way and that she was touched they allowed her to write their stories and take their pictures. Over her career, she won awards from the Associated Press and the Illinois Press Association, and enjoyed a major highlight when a photo of hers was published in the last regular issue of *Life* magazine.



She loved her family and extended family dearly and was a huge dog lover, mentioning all of her dogs over the years by name. Her closing sentence was that she hoped she had left this earth with good memories. Jane was the kind of local journalist that FREEPOD needs, and from all of us, we can say that memories she created will definitely be a big part of her lasting legacy. Thank you, Jane. We will miss you.

Update on plans for Pecatonica River Floodway

According to the Illinois Emergency Management Agency, or IEMA Freeport residents living in the Pecatonica River Floodway could be paid to have their homes demolished.

The Agency held a question and answer session with residents last week to review developments in a process that has been in the works for several years that could allow millions of dollars in Agency to remove houses and other buildings and make room for green space. There are also 39 vacant lots that are currently privately owned. Grants are voluntary, meaning people can opt-out despite the potential for future flooding.

According to William Shipley of IEMA, once a property is acquired, it becomes deed restricted and cannot be used for any purpose other than green space. The deed then belongs to the city of Freeport.

City leaders have said flooding in the area puts people and property at risk and since 2021, about 40% of the homes in the area have been demolished. Fifty still remain, and IEMA has stated a goal of removing them by this Fall.

ADA ramps in Freeport

In the last four years, 322 ramps compliant with the American with Disabilities Act, or ADA, have been installed throughout the City as street projects are completed. With an average cost estimated at over \$10,000 each with added sidewalk and curbs, a total of \$3.2 million has been invested into becoming a more accessible community.

Imports and exports in Illinois

With recent news focusing on imports and exports between the United States and other countries, FREEPOD took a look at where Illinois sits in those rankings.

According to recent data from the Observatory for Economic Complexity, Illinois ranks as the third largest importer in the country behind California and Texas, meaning it imports a significant amount of goods compared to other states. In 2023, Illinois imported over \$240 billion in goods, including petroleum, smartphones, medical supplies such as immunological products, portable computers, and other commodities that were not specified.

As for exports, Illinois is the 5th largest exporting state in the country, behind Texas, California, Louisiana, and New York. Also in 2023, Illinois exported nearly \$80 billion of goods including soybeans and maize other than seed products, telephones, packaged medical supplies such as vaccines and blood products, and motor vehicles.

The state exported mostly to Canada, Mexico, China, Germany, and Australia and imported mostly from China, Canada, Mexico, Vietnam, and Japan.

For more detailed information, visit the website for Observatory for Economic Complexity, for which a link is included in the print version of this podcast. There is also a list of all the states in ranked order of imports and exports on Wikipedia when searching on the phrase "List of U.S. states and territories by

exports and imports” at these links https://oec.world/en/profile/subnational_usa_state/il and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._states_and_territories_by_exports_and_imports

HCC Board updates

At the regular meeting of the Highland Community College board last week, the board approved the first tuition rise in three years, from \$151 to \$159 a credit hour. The board also approved a short-term repair of the roof above the YMCA pool of \$150,000 which should be effective for up to 10 years, and a proposal to retain a search firm to find a new athletic director.

Financial Vice President and Treasurer Jill Janssen also reported on the impact of the current Federal “freeze” on federal grants, explaining that the college should be fine until at least February 10th.

Pretzel City charging fees for medical rides outside Stephenson County

The grant that previously helped Pretzel City Transit offset costs for medical rides outside Stephenson County has been depleted, making it necessary to charge for medical rides outside the County. The fee that is charged helps cover essential expenses such as gas, insurance, paid drivers, vehicle maintenance, and staff time required to coordinate and schedule rides.

The organization hopes to secure more funding in 2025 to reinstate more support for service to medical appointments outside the County. Pretzel City Transit is a joint effort of the City of Freeport and the Senior Resource Center.

FACC could use your help

The Freeport Area Church Cooperative could use your help! The FACC shelter is so full that they have needed to turn people away and while some meals for those at the shelter are coming from area churches, the churches are also being challenged to provide enough to serve all the people sheltering there.

At the food pantry, which was recently relocated near Maria’s Pizza on Galena Avenue, FACC provides groceries for over 300 people per month. In addition, FACC is presently short-staffed.

If you have household goods that you no longer need, please consider donating them to FACC to help at the shelter and in setting up more permanent homes for people when possible. Donations of food or money to purchase food are always welcome at the FACC food pantry on Galena. Thank you for helping others in their time of need.

New exhibit at Freeport Art Museum

The Freeport Art Museum is presenting the paintings of Judith Meyer, whose works are inspired by nature, social issues, global events, myths, and personal beliefs. Her striking manner of integrating traditional landscape formats with diverse and unexpected elements create poetic and surreal visions.

This exhibition is on view from February 14th to March 15th and is dedicated to the memory of Judith's friend Kathleen Kline. Meyer will talk about her work and life as an artist on Saturday, February 22nd in a special program at 1:30 p.m. at the Museum at 121 North Harlem Avenue in Freeport.

Freeport Public Library is fine-free

Beginning last Saturday, February 1st, the Freeport Public Library is no longer charging or collecting fees for most late items. Any outstanding late fines will be purged from patron accounts except for a few specific learning-kit type items. When overdue items are returned, they will be checked in with no overdue charges, unless they are never returned at all or damaged.

Overdue fines are widely recognized by professional library organizations as a form of social inequity. The American Library Association and others have conducted multiple studies that show that imposing fines does not teach responsibility or motivate borrowers to return items on time.

For more information, visit freeportpubliclibrary.org.



Next up in Lectures in American History Series

In other Library news, *Into the Wild Blue Yonder*, the next offering in the Freeport Public Library's Lectures in American History Series, will cover the development of the USAF since its creation in 1947. The development of technology and a review of major operations will be reviewed.

The program will be presented by Martin Quirk from 6:00 to 7:45 p.m. next Tuesday, February 11th in the main meeting room at the Library.

***The Green Book* presented at HCC**

To commemorate Black History Month in February, Highland Community College's Clarence Mitchell Library is hosting guest speaker and exhibitor Tammy Gibson in presenting *The Green Book: Navigating the Journey to Equality*, next Tuesday, February 11th at 10:00 a.m. at the Library. Gibson is the founder of the Illinois Black History Museum, as well as an author, re-enactor and black history traveler.

Gibson will explore the historical significance of *The Green Book*, the challenges of racial discrimination it sought to address, its cultural impact on the African American community, and how it became a

symbol of resilience, hope, and the fight for civil rights. Her presentation will offer a glimpse into the everyday lives of Black travelers during a time of significant social challenges in the country.

Gibson's exhibit on The Green Book will be also be available in the Library from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Tuesday.

Vote for a new Illinois State Flag...by next Friday

Do you like our state flag, or would you like to see something different on the flagpole? If you'd like to make your opinion known on a new state flag for Illinois, you have until next Friday to vote if the state should have a new one and if so, choose your favorite design. The Illinois Secretary of State's voting website will be open through next Friday, February 14th.

Voters can choose from 10 designs for a new flag, the current flag, the 1918 centennial flag, or the 1968 sesquicentennial flag. Individuals can vote for one flag once every 24 hours and may select the same or a different flag each day.

The online vote is non-binding but will be presented to Illinois General Assembly by April 1. After the report, which will include a voter-informed recommendation as to whether the state should adopt a new flag, the Assembly will have the final say.

To view the designs and vote, just Google "vote for new Illinois state flag" or visit the URL in the print version of this podcast. (www.ilsos.gov/stateflag)

The week ahead...

As we look at the week ahead, we first want to send a shout-out to students in the choir, orchestra, and band at Freeport High School, who have been recognized for qualifying and will participate in the state music festival in February. Congratulations, music students!

If you're looking for a wonderful event tomorrow night, tickets are still available for the Wine and Spirits Tasting fundraiser at the Freeport Art Museum. For more information and to purchase tickets online head to the Museum's website at www.freeportartmuseum.com and click on "events."

It's also another weekend for the Stephenson County Winter Farmers Market, so head to the Stephenson County Farm Bureau in Freeport from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturday to see what taste treats and crafted items they will have waiting for you. And as we mentioned last week, we're already looking forward to the Arctic Ale and Art Walk in downtown Freeport on Saturday, February 22nd.

As a reminder, 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.

What's Going on in Stephenson County?

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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 and TimBeck2 host Tim Connors interviewing John Garvens, who has opened Freeport Martial Arts in downtown Freeport. Garvens is hosting his first classes week, ranging from women's self defense to Jiu-Jitsu, with special events this Friday and Saturday. We'll still hear soon from Rachel Gastel, who was originally slated for this week to discuss overcoming challenges with alcohol.

Next week, FREEPOD host Alan Wenzel visits with Julie Hilliger and Julie Wenzel, two members of the executive team of 100 Women Who Care, a group of women in Stephenson County that over the last decade has distributed nearly a half-million dollars to charitable organizations in the County. Their tenth anniversary is this year and their next meeting is this Thursday evening, February 13th. If you'd like to

know more or join them then, please contact them at 815-275-1681. That's 815-275-1681. Their conversation will post at noon on Tuesday, February 11th.

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.

And 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 as each new pod airs. You can also always click through to our pods through our Facebook page or the website of our partner, WNIJ National Public Radio in DeKalb, at www.northernpublicradio.org. Thank you for listening to FREEPOD!

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