
ANNUAL REPORT 2021



**GREATER
FREEPORT
PARTNERSHIP**

COLLABORATION IN ITS TRUEST FORM

Summary of Activities

AN ANNUAL ACCOUNT OF PROGRAMS,
PLANNING AND PROGRESS ON IDENTIFIED
PRIORITIES IN FREEPORT & STEPHENSON
COUNTY.



Highlights of 2021

33

Ribbon Cuttings

20 New Business
10 Relocating or New Ownership
3 Special Projects

1,053

Total Building Permits

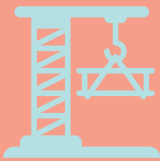
City of Freeport issued 942 permits for a total investment of \$24 million.

Stephenson County issued 111 permits for a total investment of \$15 million.

\$109.5M

Investment

High Point Solar, LLC's investment of a 100 MW solar farm in rural Stephenson County is the largest investment in 2021 with 150+ construction jobs and will generate \$13 million in property taxes over 35-year project lifetime.



Property Development

Intergovernmental Agreements have been signed between City of Freeport and Stephenson County to bring water/sewer service to the 127-acre Mill Race Crossing Industrial Park.

42,965

Overnight Stays

Data compiled from our Freeport hotels has shown a drastic increase in business and leisure travel over 2020.

866

Volunteer Hours

More than 563 volunteers have contributed to the success of the Partnership. Whether they are Ambassadors, board members, event and committee volunteers or clean-up helpers, we appreciate every effort.

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C. Mark Williams

Executive Director

Despite all the positive trends that are emerging from COVID-19, millions of Americans continue to work at home; a shift from working from home out of necessity to working from home by choice. This trend reinforces the need for the Greater Freeport Partnership to bring together strategies that not only attract, expand and retain businesses but to also retain and attract remote workers (talent) in our community. Locally we can find similar situations with respect to specific industries including insurance companies, financial and accounting institutions, corporate back office, IT, engineering, sales and telemarketing. The Partnership is working on immediate strategies designed to improve our ability to retain and attract talent.

Design & Placemaking – A high quality of life means the community values good design, places an emphasis on quality of place, and offers a multitude of activities. These attributes are attractive and weigh heavily in one's decision on where to locate. Placemaking is a tool to retain and recruit talent. Our efforts to obtain Main Street Accreditation help with the design and placemaking of the City of Freeport's downtown core. We will also be working closely with the City of Freeport as it begins reconstruction of Chicago Avenue by assisting with communication to local businesses throughout the reconstruction phase.

Come Home Campaign – We know people who have previous ties with NWIL through school, friends, or family are more likely to move back to the region. We will be highlighting the stories of NWIL residents who have left and then decided to come home—to work, start a business, or raise a family through our Come Home Campaign.

Population Loss will Make it Difficult – The 2020 Census results show Stephenson County currently has 45,495 people, which reflects a decrease of 2,216 people since 2010. The City of Freeport lost 1,665 residents bringing its population to 23,973 based on the 2020 Census. Decreasing population will reduce the number of rooftops with disposable income to support our small businesses, including quality retail and entertainment venues that are important to attracting and retaining talent.

Greater Freeport Partnership Leadership:

The Partnership is fortunate to have leaders at the table to make a difference. With representatives from the City of Freeport, Stephenson County, FSD 145 and Highland Community College, along with private business partners, the organization is in the best position to develop strategies to retain and attract talent for the re-emergence of our area.



Our Vision

One Organization. One Voice.
One Mission.

To Promote & Grow Freeport & Stephenson County



We Value

Art, Design & Culture
Diversity in All Forms
Entrepreneurial Spirit
Outdoor Experience
Giving Back
Always Learning



Our Mission

The Greater Freeport Partnership is the place where organizations and people unite to advocate for the region, drive economic growth and champion a talented, workforce ready community.



Our History

The Partnership was formed in 2018 combining the efforts of the Freeport Area Chamber of Commerce, Northwest Illinois Development Alliance, Stephenson County Convention & Visitors Bureau and Freeport Downtown Development Foundation.

Transitioning Leadership

Gary Quinn

Outgoing Board President

"First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity," 1Tim. 2:1-2(NASV)

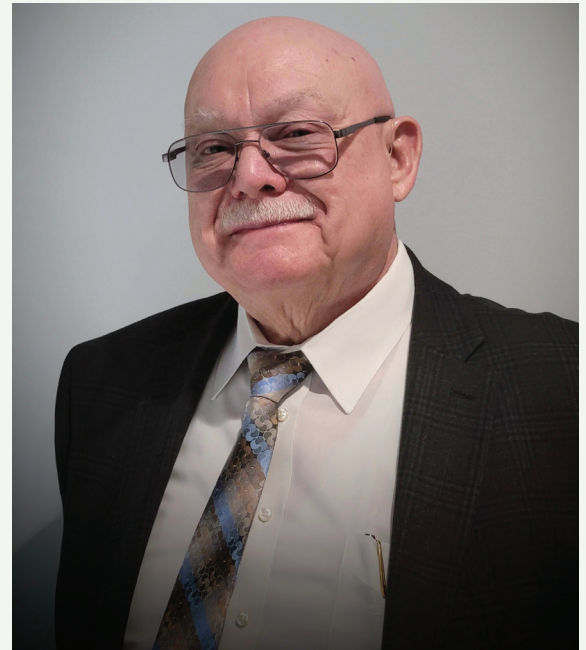
I wish this were true today. Instead of prayers, today's culture first posts something, anything, on miss-named (anti) social media.

We began forming the Partnership in late 2016. Key and crucial was the encouragement, and full participation of our local governments. Our Partnership could not and would not exist without them. Specifically: The City of Freeport, Stephenson County, Freeport Park District, Freeport School District 145 and Highland Community College. Our interactions outside this core have been exemplary as well.

Every single month we hear of their work, dreams, and heartaches. We are blessed to have committed people of goodwill in the service of our community. They share triumph and frustrations. Every month their goodness, passion for this community and love for the citizens is evident. Daily, these same servants face a barrage of criticisms from our army of keyboard warriors. I learned years ago it takes no courage to throw stones, or lob verbal grenades, as others are engaged in the work. True courage is exhibited by those, who leave everything they have on the battlefield of civic engagement. In public. Accountable. Often bruised and fatigued.

If I could have one wish for our future, it would be we would receive information and news through a filter of goodwill. At the national level, each utterance and action is met with derision, opposition, vitriol, and disbelief if it comes from a political rival. Information, "news," is consumed without context or discernment.

My wish would also include that every day, we would not only begin the day as instructed, but to do so with sincere gratitude for all of those who labor and serve the public. In government or out.



2021 Board of Directors

Gary Quinn, Chairperson

Mark Gridley, Vice-Chair

Chris Schneiderman, Treasurer

Josh Elliott, Secretary

Mike Martin

Mike Meade

Ross Vehmeier

Mark Wright

Randy Bukas, City of Freeport

Scott Helms, Stephenson Co. Board

Dr. Anna Alvarado,

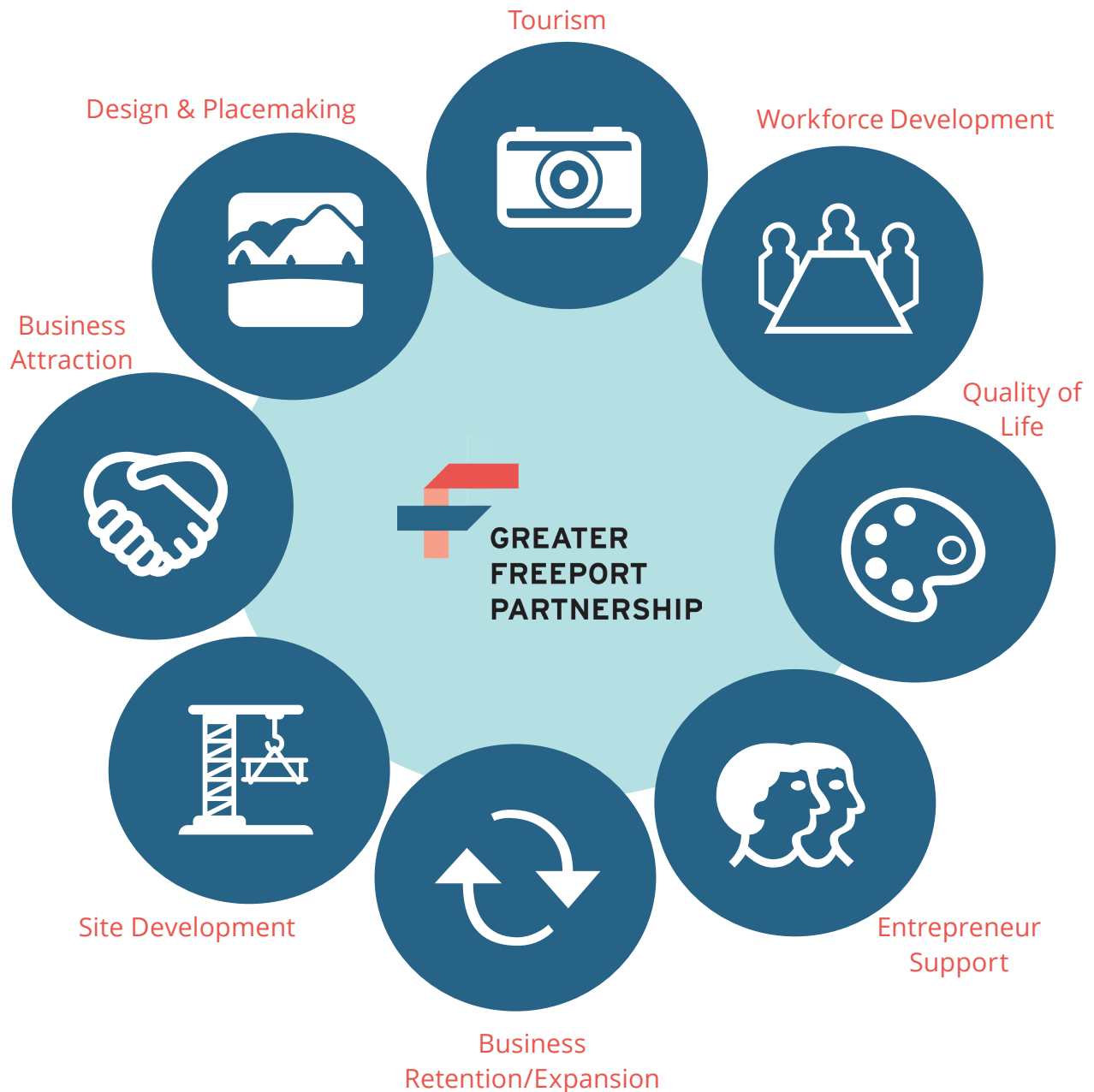
Freeport School District 145

Christine Kuberski,

Highland Community College

Economic Development

Economic Development is at the center of everything we do. The Partnership's economic development efforts fall into many categories but all are integrally tied together and need to work in tandem to make a thriving local economy. Businesses need workers to operate and the workforce wants to live in communities with beautifully designed places and a high quality of life. To grow our economy existing businesses need to expand and develop sites, or redevelop buildings; and new businesses need to start. Moving the needle on economic development requires continuous synchronized efforts in all of these areas. Of foundational understanding to the Partnership is the theory that a community's standard of living can only be achieved and preserved through a process of human and physical development that is based on principles of equity and sustainability. The Partnership cannot do this work alone, that is why we are committed to continuous collaboration with our business, education and government partners so Freeport and Stephenson County **become the destination of choice for live, work and play.**



Site Development/Business Retention & Expansion

In 2021, the Partnership received 27 RFP for attraction projects, totaling \$10.5 billion in investment and 11,000 jobs. The Greater Freeport Partnership was only able to submit an RFP for 6 of these opportunities because frequently these projects are greenfield developments that require shovel-ready sites with utilities already in place, something Stephenson County has lacked. Fortunately, the City of Freeport and Stephenson County entered into an Intergovernmental Agreement to extend water and sewer service to Mill Race Industrial Park, making these greenfield sites a marketable product.

The chart provides an overview summary of economic development activity broken down by project type.

Economic Development Projects	Number of Projects
Attraction	30
Expansion	2
Retention	3
Start-up	35
Property Development	5
Property Rehab/Redev.	4

The Northwest Illinois Enterprise Zone is a state-authorized, locally designated geographical area that provides special incentives to encourage economic development, strengthen the business climate, and create jobs. The zone is a helpful cost reduction tool for businesses to utilize when undergoing a development or expansion project. In 2021, the Partnership assumed responsibility for administering the zone and worked with the state and local governments to expand the zone to assist in the development of a 100 MW solar farm, High Point Solar, LLC. This one project brought over \$109.5 million in investment, 150+ construction jobs and will bring approximately \$13 million in property taxes over the 35-year project lifetime.

2021 Northwest Illinois Enterprise Zone Summary

	Number of Projects	Total Investment	Number of Jobs Created
Residential	3	\$333,533.94	3
Commercial	12	\$795,508.29	197
Industrial	4	\$174,587,451.13	85
Total	19	\$175,716,493.36	285

2021 Northwest Illinois Enterprise Zone Projects by Geography

	Number of Projects	Total Investment	Number of Jobs Created
Stephenson County	4	\$174,687,896.13	80
City of Freeport	13	\$936,597.23	203
Jo Daviess County	2	\$92,000.00	2
Total	19	\$175,716,493.36	285

Business Attraction

Business attraction is a core service of the Partnership. Our team provides assistance to new business prospects seeking to locate in the City of Freeport and Stephenson County through the following activities:

- Our staff receives a referrals and requests for information (RFs) from various sources and builds a relationship with each contact and organization.
- Explaining federal, state, and local incentives to prospective developers
- Responding to Request for Information (RFI) leads from Intersect Illinois and State of Illinois
- Contacting economic development related prospects referred to by the City of Freeport, Stephenson County, and I-39 Logistics Corridor
- Working with state and federal organizations and utility/transportation providers to respond to RFI's
- Attending meetings with the City of Freeport's Administration and Community Development Office
- Establishing relationships with real estate brokers, existing companies and potential suppliers via one-on-one meetings

Networking & Marketing Events

ICSC
AIRE Shows
SIOR Meetings
IEDA Site Selector Forums

National & Statewide Professional Associations

To establish relationships with real estate professionals, developers, and economic development specialists, Partnership staff participates in professional association and organizations, which include the following:

ICSC
IEDC
IEDA
Mainstreet Illinois
Illinois Chamber of Commerce Association
US Chamber of Commerce Association

Sector	# of Projects	Potential Investment	Potential Jobs	Status
Aerospace	4	\$157,525,000	1,256	1 project pending. 3 projects closed; no existing buildings meeting specifications available or shovel-ready sites.
Automotive	9	\$8,392,000,000	6,092	2 projects pending. 7 projects closed, no existing buildings meeting specifications available or shovel-ready sites.
Biochemical	2	\$620,000,000	126	2 projects closed, no existing buildings meeting specifications available or shovel-ready sites.
Solar	2	Undisclosed	700	2 projects closed, no existing building meeting specifications
Food Processing	7	\$1,218,295,000	1,802	2 projects pending. 5 projects closed, no existing buildings meeting specifications available or shovel-ready sites.
Vertical Farming	1	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	1 project pending.
Data Center	1	\$66,000,000	30	1 project closed, no existing buildings meeting specifications available or shovel-ready sites.
Customer Service	1	\$15,000,000	800	1 project closed, no existing building meeting specifications available or shovel-ready sites.
Total projects	27	\$10,468,820,000	10,806	6 projects pending. 21 projects closed.

Entrepreneur Support



Supporting those who **Dream Big**

Small business is the backbone to any business community. The State of Illinois saw a surge of new business startups in 2021, as did Freeport and Stephenson County.

At the Greater Freeport Partnership, we are committed to helping entrepreneurs through every stage of their business from concept development, and start-up through growth and expansion. From helping entrepreneurs find resources to answer questions and building a business plan, to helping them figure out zoning and regulatory requirements, to supporting and celebrating them when they open their doors, the Greater Freeport Partnership is working to make this an entrepreneurial friendly business climate.

Our support doesn't end once a business opens. Through providing business education programs and resources to helping navigate the challenging landscape of state and federal grants and business incentives, we work with existing members to give them the support they need to continue to thrive and grow.

302

Gale Searches

Gale Business Suite was accessed by 75 entrepreneurs for a total of 302 sessions in 2021 after launching in May.

35

Entrepreneurs

Partnership staff met multiple times with 35 entrepreneurs who have expressed interest in starting a business in Freeport or Stephenson

Design & Placemaking

The Partnership understands the importance of a vibrant, prosperous core and champions a catalyst for community revitalization.



Placemaking is an increasingly important asset for communities to competitively attract and retain residents and talent within its workforce. That is why the Beautification Committee has been rebranded into the Design & Placemaking Committee. To move the needle on revitalization we need to expand our focus from clean-ups and seasonal planting (though impactful) to encompass broader issues such as wayfinding signage, art engagement, design guidelines, etc. One large placemaking project that is underway is the Downtown Pocket Park.



The pocket park transforms the space of two condemned buildings into a useable amenity that enhances the pedestrian experience while greening our downtown. In the first two quarters of 2021, three grants were written and awarded, totaling \$17,500, to help fund the construction. Full park build out will be completed in 2022.



Other ongoing initiatives were seasonal planting and decorations within the downtown, maintenance of the 'Welcome to Freeport' gateway signs, and organizing three county-wide clean-up events, totaling over 500 volunteer hours. Volunteer efforts are extremely important to our efforts and we thank many hands for their work.

Workforce Development



23

Announcements

Monthly job opening announcements are compiled and sent to area employers as well as posted on the Partnership web site for job seekers. Job seekers were also encouraged in weekly social media posts in 4th quarter.

5

Job Fairs

The Partnership assisted local employers and organizations with job fairs and campaigns throughout the year and encouraged attendance through web site, email and social media marketing

Connecting the Employer to Workforce

2021 was an extremely challenging year for all employers regardless of their business sector. Everyone needed employees. To connect employers to workers, the Partnership focused efforts on job fairs and distributing opportunities to partner organizations that regularly interface with students and the unemployed. We worked with local employers and The Workforce Connection to organize and promote four job fairs. Additionally, we distributed monthly Help Wanted Online Job listings to our educational partners, and local social service non-profits organizations.

Similar to most communities in the nation, the Greater Freeport Partnership is still re-engaging with our employers. We implemented plans to restart our Creating Opportunities for Retention and Expansion (CORE) Business Visitation Program in the first quarter of 2022. These employer visits are invaluable and give us a deeper understanding of our businesses' needs, so we can craft solutions to help solve their problems.

Membership

The Greater Freeport Partnership is a membership organization. Our members represent all aspects of the local economy and employ a huge portion of the workforce in Freeport and Stephenson County. We represent almost 400 member businesses and organizations. We work to provide education and services, develop programs and resources, and make connections that benefit our members and improve climate for businesses success throughout Freeport and Stephenson County. If you are interested in becoming a member, contact the Greater Freeport Partnership!

One organization, one voice. Our public / private partnership with the City, the County, Highland Community College, Freeport School District 145 and our members are vital to the economic growth and vitality of our community. Our networking and camaraderie allow us to be proactive rather than reactive to help advocate for the region, drive economic development growth and champion a talented, workforce ready community.

33

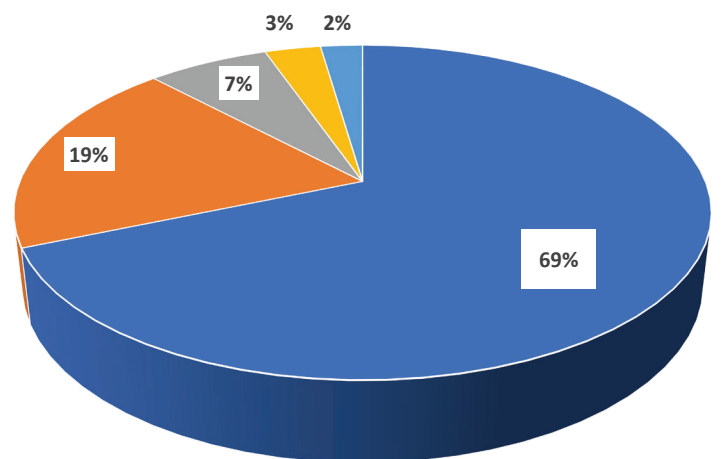
New Members

New members to the Partnership who have either joined for the first time, opened a new business or renewed after a 2+ year membership gap.



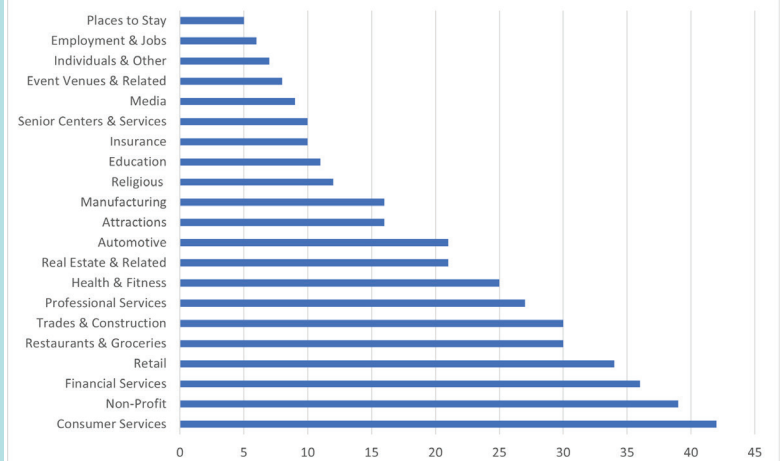
2021 Annual Dinner

Membership by Member Type



Basic Premier Partner
Major Partner Subsidiary Non-Profit/Indiv.

Membership by Industry Type



Business Services

Providing our Members with a Network of Opportunity

The Partnership prides itself in the network of resources, and connections it is able to provide to members and the community.

The Partnership values the input of our community and business owners and is fortunate to have advisory committees for several of our core functions. The **business services committee** provides guidance and direction in educational offerings and resources for business owners. The **marketing committee** addresses the promotional strategies of all Partnership efforts including media, design and new ideas to meet organizational goals. The **design and placemaking committee** consider benefits to the visual aesthetic of neighborhoods and spearheads projects to make improvements.

Women's Enrichment Network (WEN) connects, empowers and inspires female leaders to serve one another and our community by providing personal and professional growth resources. Meetings are once a month over the lunch hour and offer attendees the opportunity to network and learn more about a relevant topic that can support their leadership and professional development. Recent topics have included: 'How to Deal with the Imposter Syndrome', 'Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Training', 'Time Management', 'Leadership Development', and 'ADHD & Adulthood'. Andrea Schultz Winter facilitates monthly meetings, but the group is organized and led by a Steering Team of volunteers.

In an increasingly digital environment, the Partnership invested in **mobile app technology** to offer businesses, residents and visitors an opportunity to connect with all Freeport and Stephenson County offers with the ease of technology. The app includes a membership directory, business services menu (including member log-in), events, and things to do.

33

Ribbon Cuttings

20 New Businesses

10 Expanded or Relocated

3 Special Projects

30

Member Events

When health guidance allowed, we were able to offer events such as Rise N' Shine Breakfast and Business After Hours. WEN meetings were also held in-person and virtually as restrictions allowed.

325

App Downloads

The Partnership launched a mobile app in July 2021 with the intention of providing an additional benefit to members with quick access to contact information as well as information on events and things to do.

Community Outreach



Blackhawk Monument



Holiday Hero Tree

Building Engagement and Cultivating Pride

The Partnership is a catalyst for civic involvement connecting resources, building community and celebrating our successes together.

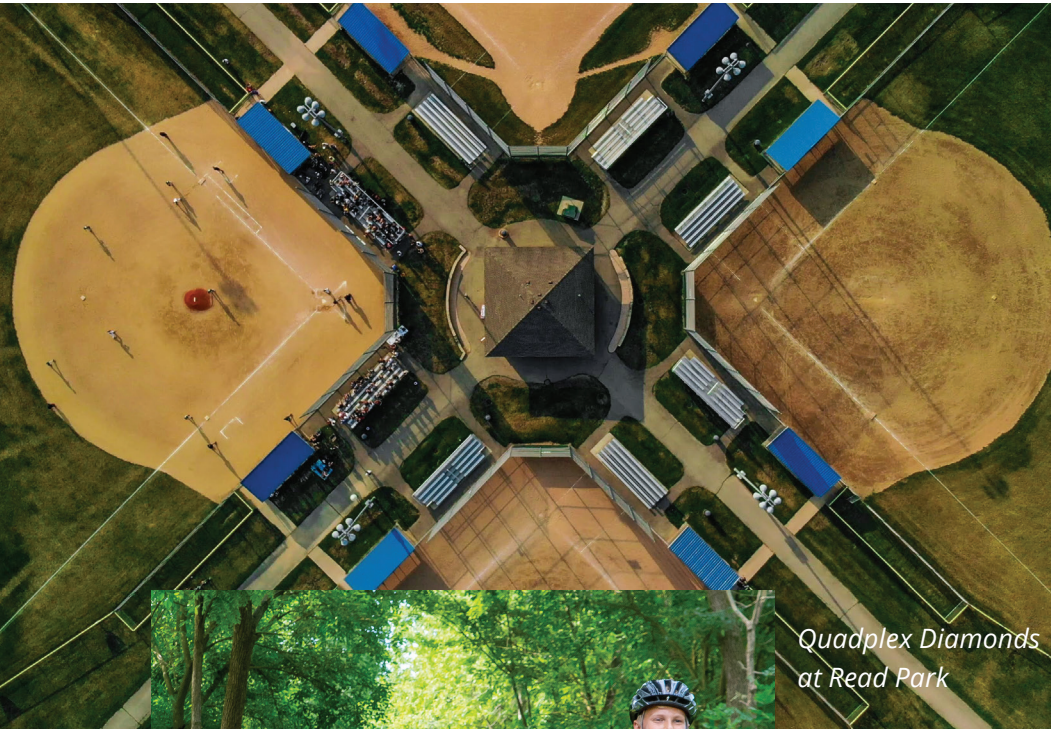
The Partnership receives a weekly digest of grant opportunities from federal, state and private organizations. These opportunities are reviewed and relevant grants forwarded to partner agencies. Over the past year 128 grant opportunities were sent to 33 partner nonprofits and education institutions.

Ambassadors for the Greater Freeport Partnership are the ultimate volunteers for community engagement. The “red coats” have served as hosts to nearly two dozen networking events, emcees for 33 ribbon cuttings and have served the public and the Partnership in a variety of other capacities in 2021. More than 26 Ambassadors represent their employers and the Partnership at a variety of community events and functions.

Young Professionals Network encourages the next generation of community leaders and advocates through networking and educational opportunities and service projects. YPN is led and organized by younger members who plan and promote events to a wider audience of professional people who are looking to increase their involvement and learn about one another including a golf outing and care of a gateway sign in 2021.

The Partnership extends its efforts to bring the entire community together. Programs such as the **Holiday Hero Tree**, opening of **Lake Le-Aqua-Na State Park**, rehabilitation of the **Blackhawk Monument** and so many others continue to shine a positive light on amazing projects throughout the county. Magnifying programs provided by the Freeport Public Library, Freeport Art Museum, local non-profits, and many others creates a holistic view of all there is to see and do. Promoting the efforts of our partner agencies in the city and counties contributes to the tremendous possibility and growth that is attainable in our area.

Tourism Services



*Quadplex Diamonds
at Read Park*



Jane Addams Trail

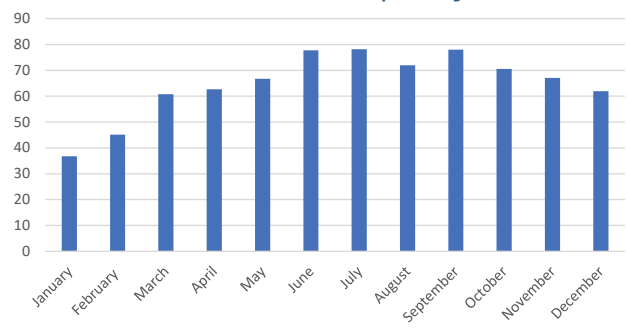


Lincoln-Douglas Debate Square

Stephenson County Visitor Center remains an asset for tourists and residents alike for information, merchandise and a friendly guide to all Freeport & Stephenson County offer. The visitor center welcomed over 10,000 people in 2021 with more than 60 percent coming from outside of the area.

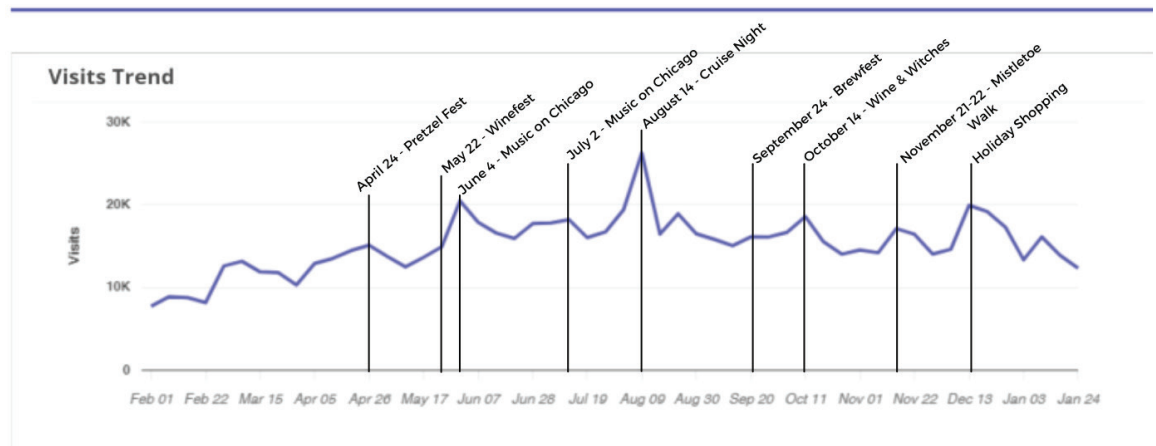
Occupancy tracking has remained a key focus of our economic efforts to monitor the return on our investments in marketing for our taxing bodies as well as businesses who benefit from out-of-town stays. Hotels in Freeport were nearly at capacity every weekend May-October (considered the tourism season) with strong rates throughout the week as well, proving a great base in business travel.

2021 Hotel Occupancy Rates



Marketing

Marketing efforts from the Partnership vary in audience, media and content based on the goal of each message.



The clear goal of event marketing is to drive traffic to the event and to the downtown area. With the help of our new geofencing software, we can see the impact of an event on Downtown Freeport pedestrian traffic during events proving that our marketing efforts are returning on our investment and reaching their overall objective of bringing new people downtown. For reference, average downtown traffic in 2019 was 1,293/day or 9,051/week.



Digital visitor marketing in 2021 was focused on bringing visitors to enjoy our outdoor spaces as well as shop and eat in Downtown Freeport. The campaign reached nearly 700,000 potential visitors in a 150-mile drive distance in May -October. The campaign ran on the ALL IN Stephenson County tourism social media brand pages.



Weekly event guide has reached over 1,000 direct subscribers both locally and regionally. This digital guide is a comprehensive, inexpensive way to reach residents and visitors to promote all there is to do in Freeport and Stephenson County expanding on quality of life and revenue opportunities for businesses.

Events

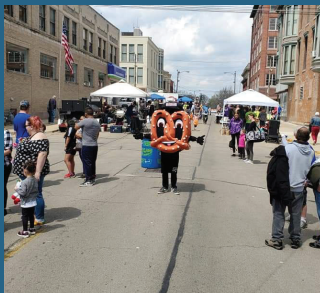
Entertaining & Engaging Every Audience

Building the quality of life residents are proud to call home and attracts visitors to keep coming back.



Cruise Night - August 13

11,579 people downtown



Pretzel Fest

April 24

4,539 people downtown



Pretzel City Winefest

May 22

250 attendees



Music on Chicago

June 4, July 2, August 6

850 average attendees



Partnership Golf Outing

August 26

150 attendees



Pretzel City Brewfest

September 25

650 attendees



Wine & Witches

October 14

3,176 people downtown



Annual Dinner & Awards

October 28

300 attendees



Bootiful Saturday

October 30

3,185 people downtown



Mistletoe Walk

November 20-21

6,778 people downtown

Partner-Level Members



Mutual Interest in Success & Development

We appreciate and thank our Partner-Level members listed below! These companies and leaders who have made voluntary extra contributions to the Greater Freeport Partnership to support our work in economic and community development, business and entrepreneurial support, tourism, workforce development and more. Their support helps to make our work possible. Thank you to these visionary organizations!

Partner-Level Members (alphabetical order)	
Adkins Energy, LLC	The Morse Group
Berner Food & Beverage	Nicor Gas
Citizens State Bank	Northwestern IL Contractors Association
**City of Freeport	Plager, Krug, Bauer, Rudolph & Stodden, Ltd.
ComEd	Snak King
Danfoss	Solutions Bank
Elliott Graphix	SSM Health Monroe
Farmer's Insurance	State Bank Freeport
Fehr Graham	**Stephenson County
FHN	Stephenson Service Co.
Fishburn Whiton Thruman, LTD	Stewart & Associates Inc.
Freeport Ford	The Helm Group
Freeport Industrial Roofing	Tri Star Metals, LLC
Freeport Park District	Union Savings Bank
Freidag Associates	US Bank
Hughes Resources	Winter & Associates Inc.
In Grown Farms, LLC2	Winter Construction Inc
Loescher HVAC	WREX-13
Midwest Community Bank	** denotes government partner

Partnership Staff



C. Mark Williams
Executive Director

The staff of the Greater Freeport Partnership may have titles specific to an area of expertise, but our collective efforts, knowledge and perspectives are seen across all sectors of work. Each individually contributes to the success and network of the organization, because this is where we are rooted and where our passion and commitment lies.



Tess Dahm
Director of Administrative Services



Bill Clow
Business Engagement Director



Andrea Schultz Winter
Development Director



Nicole Haas
Brand Director



Katie Gentz
Event Coordinator



Billy George
Administrative Coordinator



Join Us

The Greater Freeport Partnership promotes Freeport, Stephenson County and our area communities and businesses. We accomplish these goals through economic and workforce development, marketing, placemaking, business education and providing data resources. Join us in our mission as we continue to work toward prosperity for all who work, visit and call our area home.



Contact Us

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