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# ANNUAL REPORT 2022

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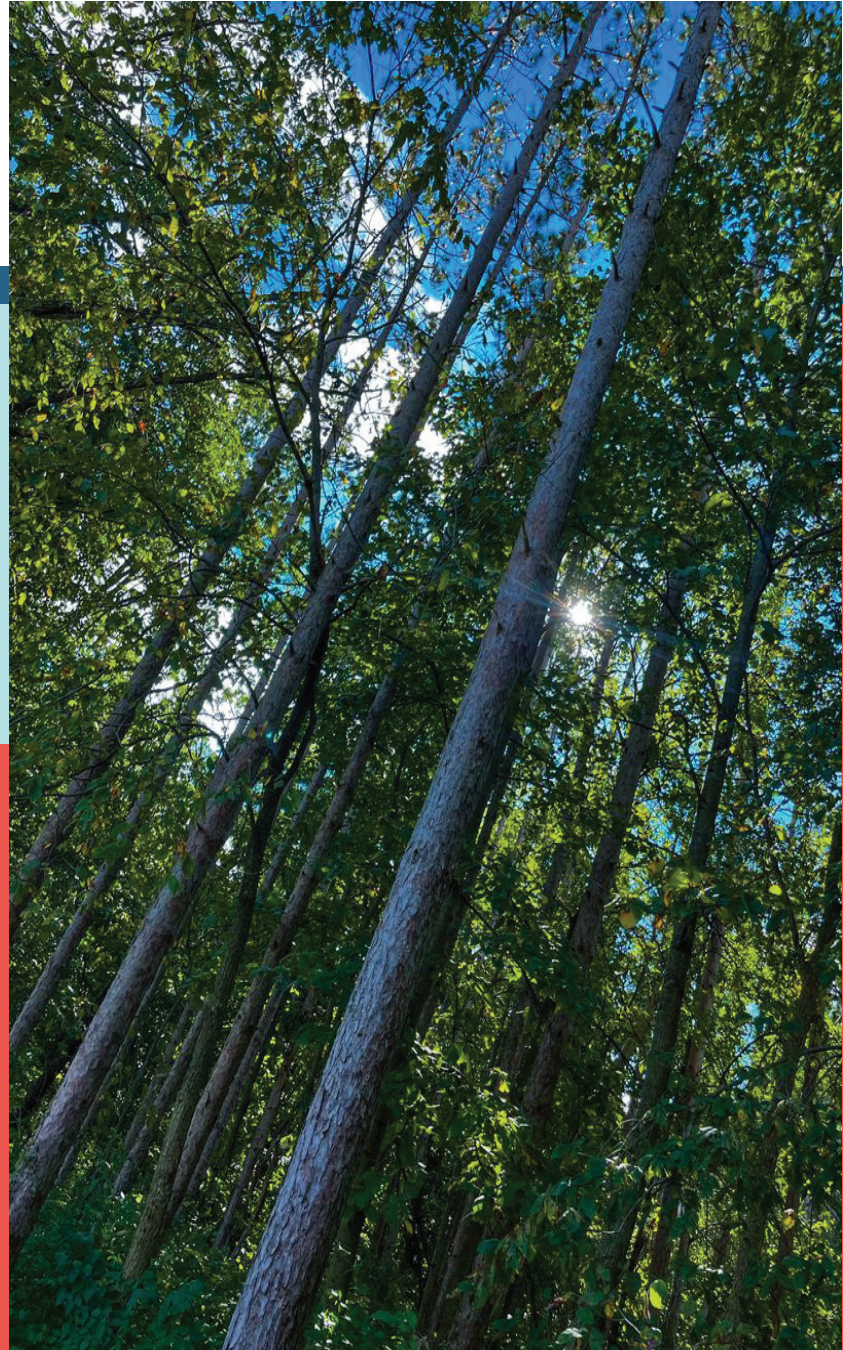


**GREATER  
FREEPORT  
PARTNERSHIP**

## 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 2022

### Freeport/Stephenson County Economic Activity

## By the Numbers

**\$15.5  
Million**



48,334 overnight stays in Freeport equal \$15.5 million in visitor spending

**\$328  
Million**



777 building permits in Freeport equal \$315 million in construction

97 building permits in Stephenson Co. equal \$13.7 million in construction

**756  
Hours**

85 volunteers gave 756 hours their time to Partnership projects

**Best  
Event**

Awarded to Pretzel City Brewfest by IL Excellence in Tourism

**\$11  
Million**

Redevelopment in The Meadows shopping center

**One  
Million**

Impressions on "Be A Trailblazer" tourism campaign



**745**



Downloads of Partnership mobile app 131% increase over 2021

**187,000  
Reach**

Impressions on the Chicago Avenue Streetscape campaign

**25  
Ribbon  
Cuttings**

For new & expanding businesses in Stephenson County

**\$11  
Million**

Redevelopment in The Meadows shopping center



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The Greater Freeport Partnership's **economic development efforts** fall into many categories, but all are integrally tied together and need to work in tandem to create 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 our areas of focus: Business retention and expansion, business attraction, design and placemaking, site development, workforce development, tourism and events, entrepreneurial support, and quality of life. In 2022, the programs developed by the Partnership gained traction in many of our focus areas as highlighted below. Our programs will gain more traction and our organization will become more efficient with technology. We will provide better **engagement and promotion opportunities** for our members. We will look for ways to build strategic partnerships both locally and regionally. We will hold an educational series with our Partnership Investors on topics that bring into focus issues around housing, education, property tax/assessments and population loss.

The Partnership understands a strong foundation must be created in our quality of life before all else. For economic development efforts to achieve a **higher standard of living** for the community, we need to have strong relationships with organizations that impact all stages of human development from birth to late adulthood. Equally as important, partnerships with organizations and firms that impact **physical land development**, infrastructure, building construction and rehabilitation play pivotal roles in industry and investment. When organizations value equity and sustainability, we can achieve the highest outcomes. The Partnership cannot do this work alone, that is why we are committed to **continuous collaboration** with

our business, education, health care and government partners for Freeport and Stephenson County to become the destination of choice to visit, live, work, play and grow.

The leadership team at the Partnership has led efforts that are yielding noticeable progress. We are pleased to recognize this success in our annual report.

**C. Mark Williams**

*Executive Director*



## 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.



## A Message from Board Leadership

**Mark Gridley**

*Board Chair*

I'd like to start in gratitude for the support our public and private partners have provided in 2022. It has been a privilege to be a member of the Greater Freeport Partnership board of directors and to serve as the chairperson throughout 2022. I have witnessed a collective strength in our community engaged in creating an even better environment for businesses and families to succeed. Through a spirit of collaboration and a future-focused vision, the board of directors continues to empower the leadership and staff to seek new opportunities and challenge the status quo. The multidisciplinary perspectives of public and private partners from across Stephenson County help to openly discuss and align the direction of programs, planning, and progress needed for all of our communities and businesses.

I am proud of the entire board of directors and the Greater Freeport Partnership team that keep us moving forward in support of our mission to promote and grow our home community. Throughout this report you will read about the good work that has happened in 2022 which makes the organizations' efforts evident in numerous areas highlighting what our community can offer to anyone willing to look. The Greater Freeport "Partnership" is strengthened by businesses of all sizes committed to a vibrant place to work, play, and thrive. Looking ahead, the board of directors will strive to broaden our impact, inclusivity, and ability to service the business needs of our entire area. In order to advance our lofty goals, we need to nourish a growing collaborative spirit to be guided with purpose and wisdom. My plea to all reading this annual report is to become engaged and help us become greater than is possible alone. Thank you for your continued support of the Greater Freeport Partnership.

*"Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success." - Henry Ford*



### 2022 Board of Directors

**Mark Gridley**, Chairperson

**Josh Elliott**, Vice-Chair

**Chris Schneiderman**, Treasurer

**Mark Wright**, Secretary

**Gary Quinn**, Chair Emeritus

**Mike Marten**

**Amy Baker**

**Ross Vehmeier**

**Carolyn Mitchell**

**Derek Thompson**

**Anthony Peska**

**Randy Bukas**, City of Freeport

**Scott Helms**, Stephenson Co. Board

**Dr. Anna Alvarado**,

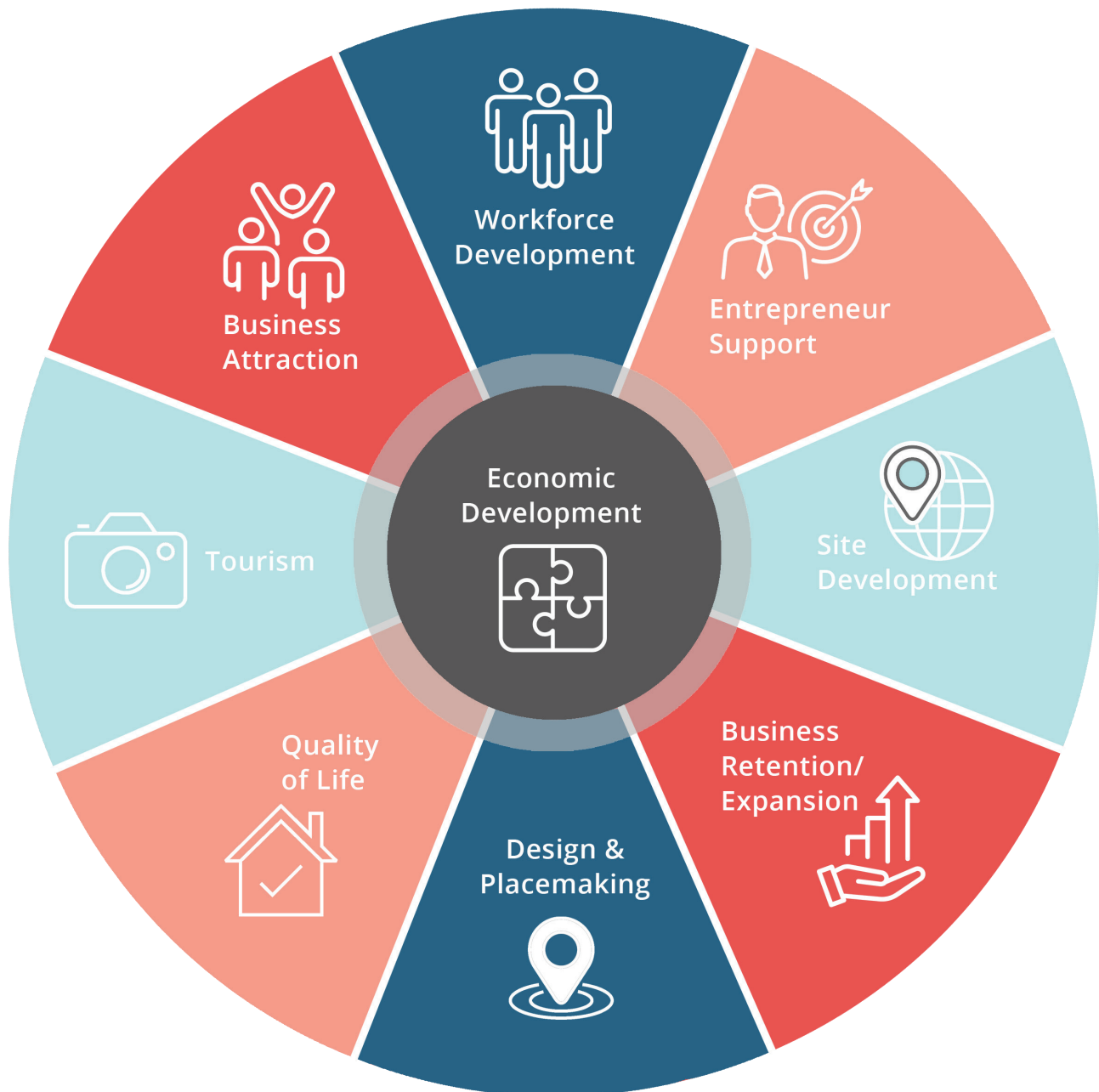
Freeport School District 145

**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 our areas of focus: Business retention and expansion, business attraction, design and placemaking, site development, workforce development, tourism and events, entrepreneurial support, and quality of life. In 2022, the programs developed by the Partnership gained traction in many of our focus areas as highlighted below. 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 2022, the Partnership received 34 requests for proposal (RFP) for attraction projects, totaling \$864 billion in investment and 14,200 jobs. The Greater Freeport Partnership was only able to submit an RFP for 11 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 a summary of economic development activity broken down by project type.

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

Economic Development Projects	Number of Projects
Attraction	44
Expansion	7
Retention	6
Start-up	4
Property Development	6
Property Rehab/Redev.	13

**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 in 2022 worked with state and local governments to expand the zone to assist in the redevelopment of The Meadows shopping center. Last year, the entire zone saw 10 projects. Of these 10 projects, seven were commercial and three were residential.



### 2022 Northwest Illinois Enterprise Zone Project Summary

	Number of Commercial Projects	Number of Residential Projects	Total Investment	Number of Jobs Created
Stephenson County	0	0	0	0
City of Freeport	7	1	\$5,538,330	18
Jo Daviess County	0	2	\$30,000	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>\$5,568,330</b>	<b>20</b>



## 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.

### National & Statewide Professional Associations

To establish relationships with other development, business and tourism professionals, Partnership staff participates in professional associations and organizations, which include the following:

*Innovating Commerce & Serving Communities*

*IL Economic Development Association*

*International Economic Development Council*

*Illinois Enterprize Zone Association*

*Illinois Tax Incrememnt Association*

*Society of Industrial Office Realtors*

*Association of Industrial Real Estate Brokers*

*American Planning Association*

*IL Council of Convention & Visitors Bureaus*

*IL Assoc. of Chamber of Commerce Exec.*

*IEDA Site Selector Forums*

*Illinois Main Street*

*Illinois Chamber of Commerce Association*

*US Chamber of Commerce Association*

Sector	# of Projects	Potential Investment	Potential Jobs	Status
Commercial	5	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	2 Active, 2 Dormant, 1 Closed
Aerospace	1	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	1 Active
Ag Technology	4	Undisclosed	500	1 Active, 1 Dormant, 2 Closed
Biotechnology	1	\$200,000,000	80	1 Active
Chemical Manufacturing	2	\$2,800,000,000	400	2 Closed
Energy	2	\$2,000,000,000	1,850	2 Closed
Electronic Vehicles	4	\$7,000,000,000	4,400	1 Active, 3 Closed
Food Processing	8	\$65,000,000	180	4 Active, 4 Closed
Manufacturing	6	\$187,000,000	566	2 Active, 1 Dormant, 3 Closed
Pharmaceutical	1	\$2,000,000,000	2,000	1 Closed
Recycling	3	\$850,000,000,000	320	2 Active, 1 Closed
Solar	3	\$150,000,000	2,700	1 Active, 2 Closed
Healthcare	1	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	1 Active
Total	41	\$864,402,000,000	12,996	16 Active, 4 Dormant, 21 Closed Projects

## Entrepreneur Support



## Supporting those who **Dream Big**

Small business is the backbone to any business community. 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.

The Partnership was designated a partner in the Small Business Navigator for the Back2Business Grant Program and helped dozens of local businesses apply for funding. In the second quarter of 2022, the state finished reviewing applications and awarded 32 Stephenson County businesses with grant dollars from the program. Grants ranged from \$5,000-85,000. In total, \$795,000 were awarded to businesses in the county.

Working in conjunction with the City of Freeport, Partnership staff was awarded a grant from the National League of Cities and Rising Tide Capital to implement the digital Community Business Academy. The program was hosted weekly for 12-weeks and graduated two entrepreneurs in it's first year.

# 105

## Grant Opportunities

*Grant opportunities are regularly sent to non-profit, educational institutions and for-profit entities for possible funding.*

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## Entrepreneurs

*Partnership staff met multiple times with 27 entrepreneurs who have expressed interest in starting a business in Freeport or Stephenson County.*

## Chicago Avenue Streetscape Project

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



Partnership staff worked with the City of Freeport and local contractors to seamlessly communicate construction updates to downtown business/building owners and area residents. The project has been substantially completed in one construction season with final furnishings and trees installed in the spring. The Chicago Avenue Streetscape Project is a remarkable transformation, while necessary underground infrastructure has been updated and replaced, the public space (from building front to building front) was reconstructed in a more pedestrian-friendly manner, including bike infrastructure all while NOT compromising on-street parking. This investment raises the bar on quality in the downtown and further promotes Freeport being a destination of choice..



Developing a messaging strategy to inform residents of the positive impact the project would have on the future of downtown was key to its success and adoption. The Partnership provided consistent messaging featuring renderings of the finished project, why the project was being completed, and highlights and status updates that were imperative for positive community sentiment.



Downtown Freeport businesses were greatly impacted by the work but saw the benefits and progress for the future. Messages featured business owners who supported the project and their quotes of support. Weekly communication was also provided to downtown business and building owners with project updates and graphics to be shared with customers.



## Workforce Development



### Connecting the Employer to Workforce

The workforce challenges of 2021 have not lessened in the first quarter of 2022. Employers in every sector are having difficulty finding and retaining qualified workers. The Partnership connected area employers to Avance USA, a private consulting firm that specializes in workforce recruitment from Puerto Rico. This is a potential out-of-the-box solution that some area employers are still considering. The Partnership coordinated meeting with area housing providers to understand the market availability to place these workers. The rental market is tight, but if only one or two individuals are being placed at a time, enough units could be found.

In partnership with U of I Extension we hosted a 'Reversing the Exodus' Millennial Attraction presentation. The program was well attended. We hosted follow-up meetings with city and county leadership and the participants of the millennial panel to continue the discussion on talent attraction.

The work of building our workforce can't be done alone! In November, the Partnership hosted the first session of the Human Resources (HR) Roundtable to discuss hiring struggles for area employers and collective strategies that can be created to build and enhance the efforts of all. The HR Roundtable will continue to have regular meetings to discuss this important work.

Throughout the year Partnership staff met with the Freeport High School College & Career Academy Coach to discuss the academies and how we continue to message to area businesses to become involved. We promoted the FHS Career & Job Fair, held on November 22nd to area employers as an opportunity to connect with future workforce and expose high school students to different career paths. As the first post-COVID event, business participation was impressive.

The Partnership continues work on the Come Home Campaign which is a talent recruitment campaign aimed at former Stephenson County residents. We have conducted interviews with 6 Come Home participants. Videos are being edited with release date for early 2023.

## 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*

## Membership

The Greater Freeport Partnership is a membership organization supported through a public/private partnership with the City of Freeport, Stephenson County and the almost 400 companies and organizations that are our members. Our business members represent all aspects of the local economy and employ a significant portion of the workforce in Freeport and Stephenson County.

These members support us with their membership, with their participation, and with their ideas. 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. Our goal is to be proactive rather than reactive as we work to drive economic development, spur business success, and champion a talented, ready workforce. We work hard to truly make membership a partnership.

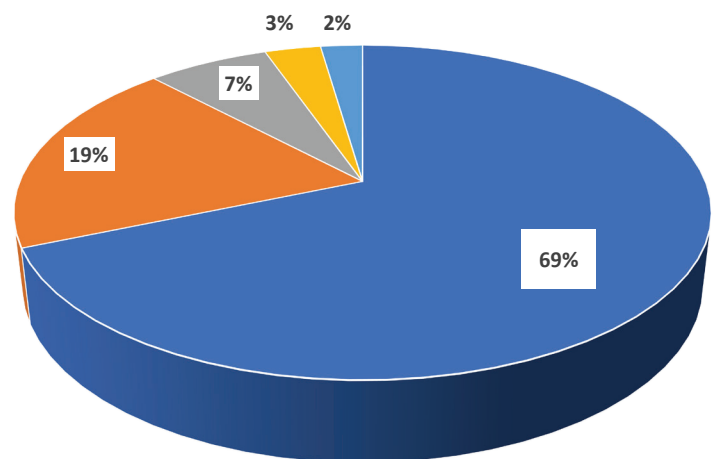
# 27

## New Members

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

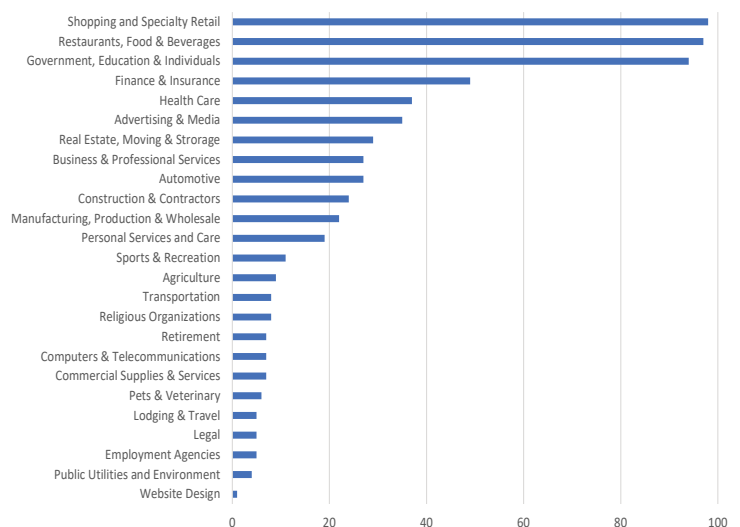


Membership by Member Type



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

Members By Industry



## Business Services

# Creating Networks, Connecting Dots, Building Bridges

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: Retirement Planning, Power of Communication and Changing Landscape of Work. Andrea Schultz Winter facilitates monthly meetings, but the group is organized and led by a Steering Team of volunteers.

The Partnership continues to provide interactive tools to members, residents and visitors in an ever-changing world. Since launching the **Partnership mobile app** in 2021, downloads and users have doubled with the help of event and member information strategies. The app includes a membership directory, business services menu (including member log-in), events, and things to do.

# 25

## Ribbon Cuttings

*15 New Businesses*

*10 Expanded or Relocated*

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## Member Events

*The Partnership hosted events such as YPN, Rise N' Shine Breakfast and Business After Hours to provide business support and networking opportunities. WEN meetings were held in-person and virtually.*

# 700

## App Downloads

*The Partnership continues to promote and additional benefit to members with quick access to contact information as well as information on events and things to do.*



## Freeport Main Street



## Building Engagement and Cultivating Pride



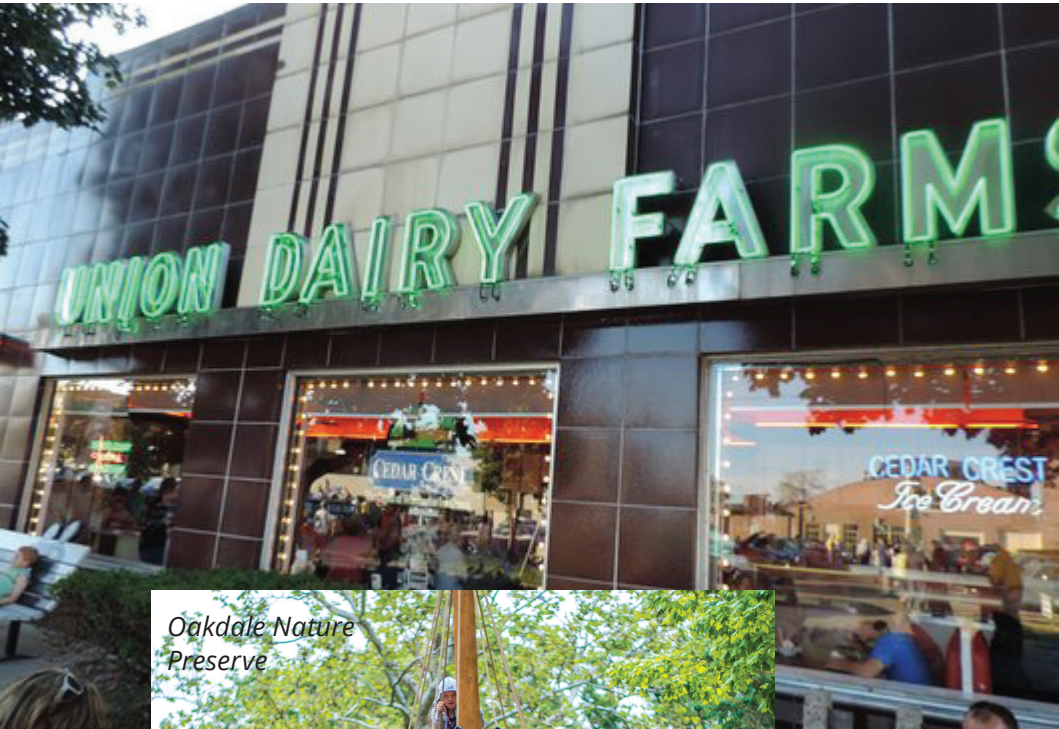
In May, Partnership staff filed an application to become an **Illinois Main Street** community. The application was accepted and in the third quarter we issued an official press release. In the fourth quarter, staff and the Partnership board underwent training with Main Street. In Q1 2023, the Partnership, in conjunction with the Main Street organization, will hold a series of community and stakeholder engagement sessions to develop transformation (revitalization) strategies for the downtown district. Exact dates/times will be forthcoming and communicated via our website, emails, and social media channels

Deininger Floral did a wonderful job maintaining the downtown flowers, hanging baskets, and other **seasonal planting** through the summer months. The Partnership continues coordination with various landscape companies and volunteer groups to provide routine maintenance to landscape beds around the 'Welcome to Freeport' gateway signs. Working with various volunteer groups, clean-up efforts were continuous, focused in various areas of the community.

**The Downtown Freeport Historic Walking Tour** launched and has been promoted on social media. A logo was developed for the tour and utilizes a free website, theclio.com for building entries. Currently, the tour has three buildings, and we look to work with building owners in 2023 to expand the tour.



# Tourism Services



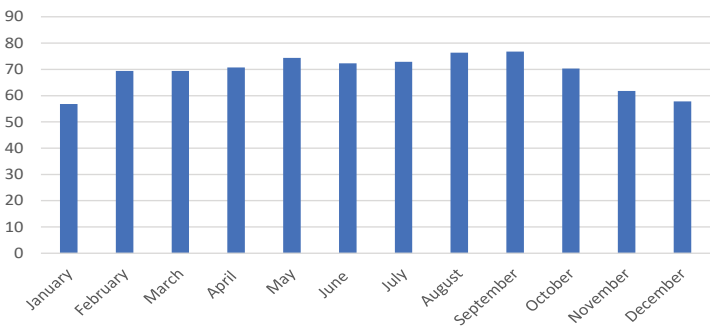
Creating an experience that residents are proud to call home and visitors are sure to remember.



**ALL IN Stephenson County Community Guide** is the resource that visitors turn to for information on attractions, things to do and upcoming events. Other tourism campaigns include the Stephenson County Restaurant Week, Northwest Illinois Ale Trail and Come Home Campaign.

**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.

2022 Hotel Occupancy Rates

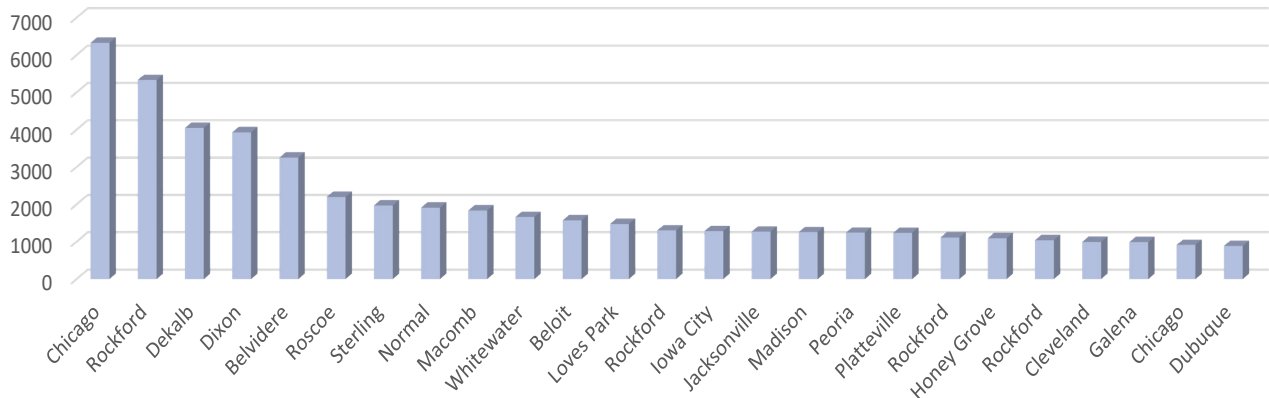




## Marketing

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

Visits



The goal of the Partnership's marketing is to bring visitors (business or leisure) to our area. With the help of our new geofencing software, we can see the impact of our efforts by the number of visits (listed on the chart above) and the their origination city. Given that marketing efforts were targeted to major metro markets more than 50 miles from Freeport, the data showing visitors from Chicago, Peoria, Milwaukee, Normal and Dubuque, are signs that the paid marketing efforts are proving results.



**Digital visitor marketing** in 2022 was focused on bringing visitors to enjoy the outdoors with the "Be A Trailblazer" campaign. A multi-media effort featured inviting images through digital advertising, search engine marketing, billboards and print advertisements. Over one million visitors were reached throughout the Midwest.



**Weekly event guide** has reached over 1,250 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.



# Entertaining & Engaging Every Audience with Events



**Arctic Ale & Art Walk**  
**March 5**  
1,100 people downtown



**Fundraising Concert**  
**April 9**  
302 attendees



**Pretzel Fest**  
**April 23**  
1,000 attendees



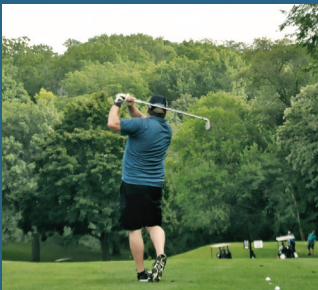
**Pretzel City Winefest**  
**May 21**  
225 attendees



**Music on Chicago**  
**June 3, July 1, August 5**  
800 average attendees



**Cruise Night**  
**August 13**  
11,000 attendees



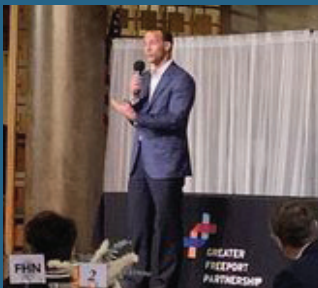
**Partnership Golf Outing**  
**August 25**  
138 attendees



**Pretzel City Brewfest**  
**September 24**  
600 attendees



**Wine & Witches**  
**October 13**  
1,300 people downtown



**Annual Dinner & Awards**  
**October 27**  
300 attendees



**Bootiful Saturday**  
**October 29**  
1,600 people downtown



**Mistletoe Walk**  
**November 19-20**  
2,200 attended over 2 days

## Partner-Level Members



### Mutual Interest in Success & Development

We appreciate and thank our Partnership Level members listed below! These are companies and leaders who have made voluntary extra payments 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!

2022 Partner-Level Members (alphabetical order)	
Adkins Energy, LLC	Nicor Gas
Berner Food & Beverage	Northwestern IL Contractors Association
Citizens State Bank	Plager, Krug, Bauer, Rudolph & Stodden, Ltd.
**City of Freeport	Rosecrance, Inc.
ComEd	Snak King
Danfoss	Solutions Bank
Elliott Graphix	SSM Health Monroe
Fehr Graham	State Bank Freeport
FHN	**Stephenson County
Fishburn Whiton Thruman, LTD	Stephenson Service Co.
Freeport Ford	Stewart & Associates Inc.
Freeport Industrial Roofing	The Helm Group
Freeport Park District	The Meadows/Source Commercial Real Estate
Freidag Associates	Tri Star Metals, LLC
GreenState Credit Union	Union Savings Bank
Hughes Resources	US Bank
In Grown Farms, LLC2	Winter & Associates Inc.
Inertia Machine	Winter Construction Inc
Loescher HVAC	WREX-13
The Morse Group	** 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.



**Jenna Fitzgerald**  
*Administrative Services Manager*



**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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- Freeport, IL 61032
- 815.233.1350
- [greaterfreeport.com](http://greaterfreeport.com)

