



Media Contact:

Nick Jupin
Grants Coordinator
City of Freeport
815-599-5810
njupin@cityoffreeport.org

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For Immediate Release

USDA awards \$100,000 to Pretzel City Kitchens project

Funds key to starting up shared-use commercial kitchen incubator for Stephenson County region

FREEPORT, IL – On October 2nd, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that the City of Freeport was awarded a \$100,000 Local Foods Promotion Program (LFPP) grant. The city's application, written in conjunction with Blackhawk Hills Regional Council, CareerTEC, and the University of Illinois Extension, with assistance from Vandewalle and Associates, was submitted in support of the Pretzel City Kitchens (PCK) project.

The City of Freeport and Blackhawk Hills Regional Council agreed to provide match, with in-kind support coming from CareerTEC, University of Illinois Extension, and independent consultant Colleen Johnson.

Mayor Jim Gitz believes that the Local Foods Promotion Program grant will be a boon for Pretzel City Kitchens and potential entrepreneurs. The mayor noted Galena's culinary reputation for restaurants and stated, "This is a chance to build on this region's longstanding agricultural tradition; we are just adding more pieces to it. Freeport can and should renew its history of innovation and growth. This city grew of age through manufacturing, insurance, banking and agriculture. Pretzel City Kitchens offers a pathway to combine career training, food products, and entrepreneurship in new ways that can make Freeport the business and entertainment center of the region. This is not just a grant but potentially a new beginning. The seeds of tomorrow are being laid today."

In addition, Theresa Wittenauer, Executive Director of Blackhawk Hills Regional Council, commented that "as a regional planning commission, it's always been a part of our mission to assist the region in developing and implementing projects that will enhance opportunities for economic growth and workforce development. We're excited to be part of a project that will provide an environment where food entrepreneurs will have the resources, workspace, and support to prepare and launch their own products."

The USDA LFPP grant will be used to pay for rent, staff, equipment, and other start-up costs related to Pretzel City Kitchens. The facility will function as a shared-use kitchen space and incorporate commercial grade equipment, allowing users to bake and cook on a large scale and certify products for sale to consumers.

The idea for PCK began with a collaborative research effort between University of Illinois Extension and the City of Freeport. It later expanded to include CareerTEC and Blackhawk Hills Regional Council as planning team members. Further, the Freeport Community Foundation has supported the project financially, and a number of community members throughout the region participate on PCK's advisory team.

Margaret Larson, Director of the University of Illinois Extension Jo Daviess-Stephenson-Winnebago Unit, indicated that Extension "has been working with local farmers' market vendors and produce growers intensively for the past ten years. Our involvement with the project grew out of this and continues to provide us with great opportunities to share our expertise and resources with the community. Producer support, food safety education, and recruitment of users are just a few of the areas of involvement for Extension staff." Furthermore, she noted that "the receipt of this grant opens the doors to the actual bricks and mortar of the project."

CareerTEC Director Jen Newendyke expressed confidence that the grant will provide "opportunities for PCK users and CareerTEC students to utilize commercial grade equipment to explore and develop recipes to contribute to the local, regional, and possibly national food economy."

PCK hopes to raise \$400,000 in total and is currently accepting donations and investor support. Any questions about investing in PCK may be directed to Daniel Payette (815-625-3854, daniel.payette@blackhawkhills.com).

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