

Math Literacy Summit brings together enthusiasts *'Futurama' writer showcases relationship between comedy and math*

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UNC Asheville students, faculty and community members discussed real world applications of mathematics at the Math Literacy Summit.

"Right away we decided we needed to have a larger community conversation around math and take the notion of math literacy a little more seriously and allow for our community to connect math literacy to these broader issues," said associate mathematics professor Samuel Kaplan.

The Saturday summit featured workshops about a range of topics from how the mind predicts the future to how parents can help with their children's math homework.

Kaplan organized the event at the Reuter Center as part of the mathematic department's community outreach.

"Rather than start by going out and telling people what they should be doing, we decided to start holding a bunch of conversations and listening to what people had to say," he said.

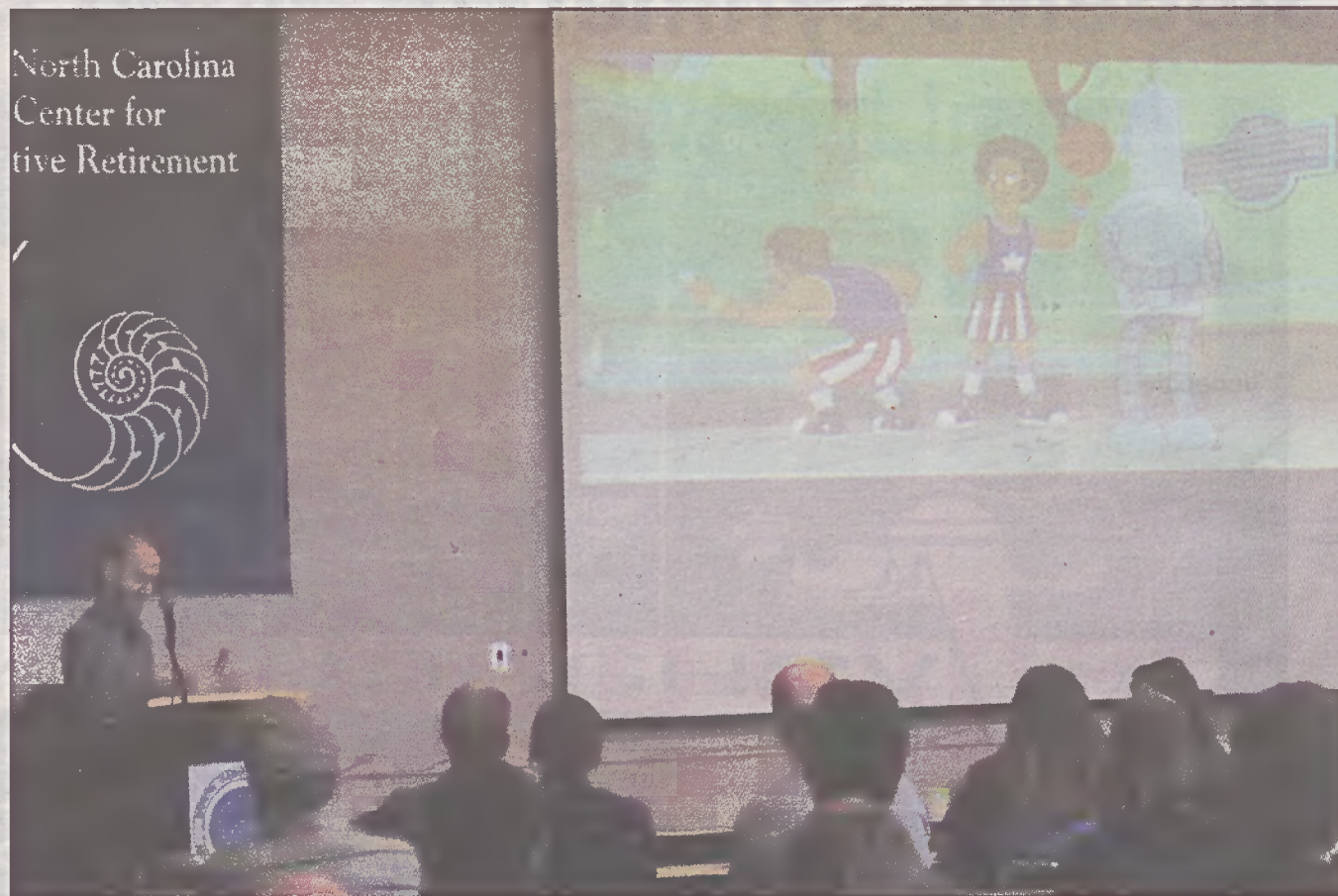
Kaplan said the department began discussions with local school systems to ensure students graduate with basic knowledge of mathematics, and soon other community organizations recognized the significance of math literacy.

"Suddenly coming to the table were Mission Hospital, the Department of Social Services, the Chamber of Commerce, the YMCA and YWCA," he said. "It turns out a number of different community organizations have different perspectives on why math literacy is important."

The solution to the challenge these organizations proposed was the formation of the Math Literacy Summit four years ago.

Asheville Mayor Terry Bellamy began the event with an introduction and said she was extremely proud to live in a city with a university that has truly integrated into the community.

Ken Keeler, a mathematician and



Dustin Stuart/staff photographer

"Futurama" and "The Simpsons" writer Ken Keeler gave a presentation at the Math Literacy Summit held over the weekend. The summit brought together students and members of the community to showcase the fun side of math and its practicality.

former writer for television's "The Simpsons" and "Futurama," was the keynote speaker. He compared constructing proofs to comedy writing and explained that a lot of what is seen in the cartoons is really carefully constructed jokes.

Freshman business student David Ogron said he was interested in Keeler's ideas of using abstract notions of math to apply creative solutions.

"Keeler gave an example about playing music, how if you associate mathematical concepts, then you can become more creative because you know the logistics and the background of the art," Ogron said.

Using an example from an actual episode of "Futurama," Keeler said

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– David Ogron,

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math is most effectively learned in the abstract, which prevents distractions from contextual details.

"It's all about abstract ideas that you can reconstruct, and if you can understand what's behind it, you will have

the sense that everything comes together," Ogron said.

According to Kaplan, math literacy is not an unattainable intellectual pursuit.

SEE MATH PAGE 6