

A MATHEMATICIAN READS THE NEWSPAPER



John Allen Paulos, Temple University
September 21, 1:15pm
Wachman Hall 617

Professor Paulos' talk, based on the book with the same title, investigates the mathematical angles of stories in the news and offers novel perspectives, questions, and ideas to coffee-drinkers, strap-hangers, policy-makers, gossip-mongers, bargain-hunters, trend-setters, and others who can't get along without their daily paper. Mathematical naivete can put such readers at a disadvantage in thinking about many issues in the news that may seem on the surface not to involve mathematics at all. "Number stories" complement, deepen, and regularly undermine "people stories." The notions of probability and randomness can enhance articles on crime, health risks, or other societal obsessions. Logic and self-reference may help to clarify the hazards of celebrity and spin-doctoring. Business finance, the multiplication principle, and simple arithmetic point up consumer fallacies, electoral tricks, and sports myths. Chaos and non-linear dynamics suggest how difficult and frequently worthless economic and environmental prediction is. And mathematically pertinent notions from philosophy and psychology provide perspective on a variety of public issues. These ideas provide a revealing, albeit oblique slant on the traditional Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How of the journalist's craft.

Joel Achenbach, from the Washington Post, says "It would be great to have John Allen Paulos living next door. Every morning when you read the paper and came across some story that didn't seem quite right - that had the faint odor of illogic hovering about it - you could just lean out the window and shout, "Jack! Get the hell over here!"..... Paulos ... has now written a fun, spunky, wise little book that would be helpful to both the consumers of the news and its purveyors."

We do have Professor Paulos (www.math.temple.edu/paulos) "living" next door here in Wachman Hall and we hope you will take advantage of this!