



Mike Swanson describes how different Saturn's rings look depending on the year.

Star parties on Okinawa

Story and photos by Jennifer Lown

Do you love keeping track of stars? Not the ones you see in People magazine but the ones who only make an appearance on a clear night? Then you should stop by a Ryukyu Astronomy Club meeting. Meetings are held on the second Saturday of the month at 7 p.m. at the Camp Lester Hospital Conference Room B. If you enter the hospital via the main entrance, just follow the strategically placed signs that will lead you to the conference room.

Meetings open with regular member introductions and a presentation on an astronomy topic. At the latest meeting, held on April 21, they talked about Saturn and its rings. The material is easy to understand, even for a novice astronomer, and interesting.

After the presentation, the floor is open for discussions and questions. "A lot of people are interested in astronomy but they're not sure how to get involved and make it a viable hobby" said Mike Swanson, club member. "Being around people who have some experience is the key to actually learning anything and

it keeps your interest going by being around others who are interested in astronomy as well."

After each meeting, if the weather cooperates, the group proceeds to a dark site at Torii Station for a star party. This is a great opportunity to utilize some of the experience of the seasoned astronomers. You don't need a telescope to attend. Just remember to always ask permission before using someone else's equipment.

An advantage of joining the club is learning which equipment works for star gazing. "Astronomy equipment is always a series of tradeoffs because there is no perfect telescope for everything" said Swanson. "There are telescopes that are perfect for one use and okay for others."

Viewing a galaxy that's far away isn't cheap, so talk to some of the other members before making a big purchase. They might have already used the equipment and be able to give you some advice. "Astronomy can be an expensive hobby so it's good to have the advantage of experience from others to

find out if that's really what you want to do with your money" said Swanson.

Why should you join the astronomy club? "Join only if you're interested in astronomy I suppose" Swanson joked.

Here are some things to keep

in mind if you're thinking about joining. There are no age limits, no dues and no officers. It's just a group of individuals who like to explore and talk about the universe. For more information about the Ryukyu Astronomy Club visit www.nexstarsite.com/rac.htm.



In honor of Astronomy Day, the presentation covered the rings, facts and history of Saturn. It also included videos and photographs of the planet.