

'Encyclopedia of Stars' aimed at anyone who enjoys astronomy

December 11 2006

An astronomy expert looking for in-depth research about stars can consult the same new reference book that an undergraduate freshman with a limited knowledge of astronomy might use.

"The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Stars," by James B. Kaler, a professor emeritus of astronomy at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, covers topics from ancient to modern times.

According to Kaler, this 324-page, hardcover book – his 14th – is for anyone who enjoys astronomy. Undergraduates, graduates and professionals all can benefit from using it, he said.

Although not written in an encyclopedia-style, alphabetical format, the book does contain a myriad of information about stars that Kaler has been gathering throughout his entire career, and particularly during the past four years of researching for the book.

Cambridge University Press already had published other high-end encyclopedias on astronomy, including an encyclopedia of the sun and one about meteorites. Kaler met with a Cambridge editor and volunteered to take on the task of writing an encyclopedia about stars.

The new book contains detailed discussions on topics such as stars, constellations, magnitudes, locations, motion, double stars, star clusters and stellar evolution.

The book contains more than 230 images, including color photographs, graphs, tables and sidebars. The photographs were gathered from observatories and private photographers around the world.

In addition to using research tools and the Web, Kaler also discussed the topics with his colleagues – from the U. of I. and elsewhere – in the process of compiling information.

Each of the 14 chapters covers a different topic and stands alone. The book contains forward and backward referencing to connect information from different chapters. Kaler considers each chapter as important and interesting as the next.

"The one I was doing at the moment was always my favorite," Kaler said.

The book, completed this year, is now in bookstores and also may be found in libraries.

"It struck me that putting everything together would make a great resource," Kaler said.

Source: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Citation: 'Encyclopedia of Stars' aimed at anyone who enjoys astronomy (2006, December 11) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2006-12-encyclopedia-stars-aimed-astronomy.html>

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