

# He doesn't flee killer sharks, he pursues them

By Joanne Layman  
Island Herald Reporter

**LONGBOAT KEY** — Tangling with Jaws"-type creatures is an everyday occurrence for Bill Goldschmidt — but instead of fleeing killer sharks, he fearlessly seeks them out.

The local 29-year-old shark fisherman talked about his unusual vocation at a San Remo Womens' Club luncheon last Thursday at the Longboat Key Holiday Inn.

Sharks have gotten a bad rap, he begins. They're not out to get anyone. They eat fish — not people.

"THE JAWS IMAGE is overbuilt," he says. "Sharks don't feed on human beings — usually they attack only when they're weak or injured, when they can't compete with other marinelife for food."

It's those potentially dangerous sharks that Goldschmidt concentrates on capturing.

"Shark fishermen don't attract sharks to the beach," he says. "We're just removing the dangerous ones."

Drawing on 11 years of first-hand experience with some 4,000 sharks in waters around Anna Maria Island and Longboat Key, Goldschmidt dispels some common misconceptions about the shark.

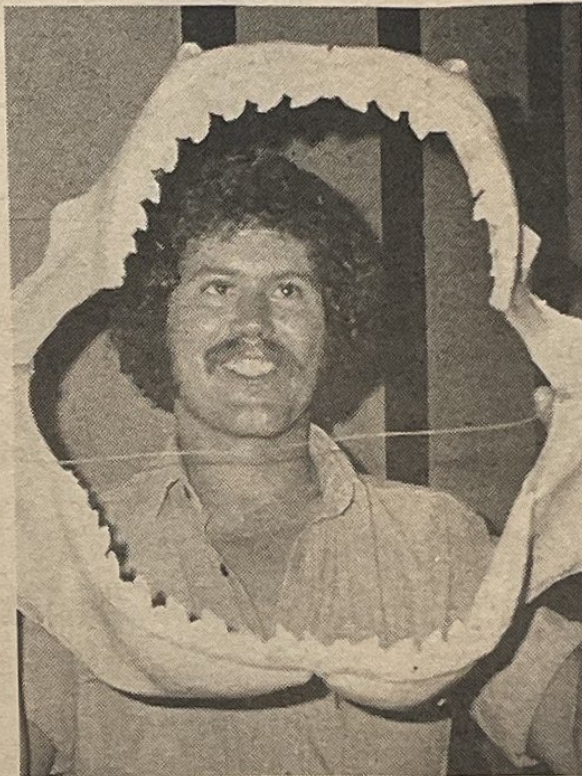
**IT'S NOT TRUE**, for example, that if you see dolphins, you can be sure there are no sharks around, he says. Sharks won't attack dolphins unless they're injured, and in fact, they commonly feed together, except when the dolphins are giving birth.

In regards to their legendary "cast-iron stomach," sharks will normally gulp down kegs of nails or other undigestibles only to give them some ballast, Goldschmidt says, as the oils their bodies accumulate from their fish diet make them unduly bouyant.f

Usually a shark will attack only if provoked or frightened by excessive movement, he says. If surprised by a shark, the worst thing one can do is to thrash around, and risk provoking an attack out of fright.

**DESPITE THEIR SINISTER** appearance, sharks are basically timid, he says, and will "run" like a dog if confronted aggressively.

Goldschmidt says he has never been seriously injured by a shark, although his boat has been attacked by the monstrous sea creatures. He was bitten only once while hand-feeding a pet nurse shark ("He missed the shrimp and got my finger").



Photography: Joanne Layman

Bill Goldschmidt holds a shark's jaw

Contrary to what is pictured in Jaws, sharks rarely swim near enough to the surface to cut the water with their dorsal fins Goldschmidt says. They stay near the ocean bottom: surfacing occasionally only to sun themselves.

"The best thing about 'Jaws' was that it cautioned people against swimming at night" he says. Sharks are nocturnal fish, and come closer to shore at night.

**A PRIME FISHING** spot for sharks is around the Anna Maria Pier, Goldschmidt says.

"I can set a line out there and hook 1w to 20 sharks a night," he says.

Goldschmidt fishes from a relatively small 20-foot boat and says that although sharks may be docile in open water, they fight furiously when hooked — and it's no small feat to subdue an enraged 400-pound

shark with six rows of razor-sharp teeth.

The fisherman has found that his best bet is to, with one hand, grab the shark by the gill behind the open jaws ("like you would a snake"), while at the same time with the other hand sink a huge hook into the shark's lower jaw.

**GOLDSCHMIDT HUNTS SHARKS** underwater by locking himself inside a steel cage, and is able to identify and type the personalities of the many varieties of sharks on sight.

The tiger and hammerhead sharks are the most dangerous, he says.

Not only does he hunt and kill sharks, but he traps them live in his specially-designed submerged pontoon for tourist attractions such as Sea World. In some cases, he says, he must revive sharks who, when trapped, give up the will to live.

**CONTRARY TO COMMON** belief, sharks have sharp eyesight, Goldschmidt says. They detect their surroundings through a keen sensor in the tip of their nose and through a "sonar" system that runs laterally alongside their body. Sharks also have a keen sense of smell.

Goldschmidt sells shark meat to local fish markets, but you probably won't see it labeled as such.

"Sharks are tasty ... but people won't buy shark meat — so it's labeled as swordfish, salt cod, scallops or sometimes even grouper," he says.

**SHARK IS MUCH** cleaner than the average fish because of its tough hide, he adds, and it has no fish odor.

"There's no foreign matter inside the meat, and it's much healthier, full of protein," he says.

Not only do sharks provide food, but they're used for cancer study. Researchers are attempting to isolate an anti-body resident in sharks that makes them immune to cancer.

**"EVEN THOUGH THEY** appear fearsome and grotesque, they may benefit us very much in years to come," Goldschmidt says.

Although he respects those with extensive education in the field, Goldschmidt prefers to get his education first-hand.

"I don't agree with a lot of scientists when it comes to dealing with sharks," he says. "In the open water, it's better left to fisherman who have had first-hand experience."