

# 89 to go

**JIM GRIFFITHS**  
Publisher, Nautical Mile

When I was a kid in Key Largo one of my jobs was at the Ocean Reef Club. It's a private club on the northern tip of the island where I worked in the ship's store. First mates on the charter boats were in high demand. They were hung-over a lot.... so I took their place a couple times a week.

These were not "Head-Boats" where people stood shoulder-to-shoulder getting lines tangled. They were multi-million dollar luxury fishing yachts. As we idled through the main channel I'd comment to the charter about how Bimini was only a couple hours "that way" and occasionally it worked. We'd head for Bimini, fish through dark, and the charter took a seaplane home. The captain and I had the boat to ourselves and fished our way back. It was quite a life!

I kept a cast net on the floor of my 69' El Camino. On my way to work I stopped on the side of the road and caught a few finger-mullet to cast at the Tarpon that resided in Ocean Reef's deep-water canal system. A small finger-mullet swam across the canal as if it were trained to, and none made it across. This is when I got "hooked" on Tarpon fishing. Residents on the canals would have coffee on their porches while watching me wrestle 100+ pound Tarpon a couple mornings a week.

The process of catching a Tarpon, from an aquatic explosion to touching the leader, is a unique experience that no fish on our coast can match. Many people just want to feel what its like to catch only one. While some people tell the story of that "one" all of their life, others get "hooked" and pursue what *Tarpon Hunters* call a "Lifetime Number."

I recently had the pleasure of spending time with Jerry Geyer, retired NY City Fire Chief. I wanted to see his Tarpon fishing trophy collection and it turned into a 4-hour evening around the pool at his Cape Coral waterfront home. As my wife and I enjoyed the best home-made pizza you could ask for, I listened to Tarpon fishing stories that dated back to the 80's when he joined the Cape Coral Tarpon Hunters Club.



Jerry started visiting the Keys and other various parts of Florida on fishing trips back in the 70's and settled down in Cape Coral. The draw was Tarpon fishing, and his attraction to the club was because they were getting away from hanging Tarpon on nails for photos, and instead counting how many you could get to the boat. This would preserve the species and makes a lot of great fishing tales.

Jerry started "counting fish." Every Tarpon that got close enough to the boat to touch the leader was considered a "catch". He has a clear memory of his first fish with fishing partner Joe DiGregorio, and in 1996 his personal count reached 67. In 2004 it was 132. As I sat with him last month his count was 911. (This was an interesting number considering his career.)

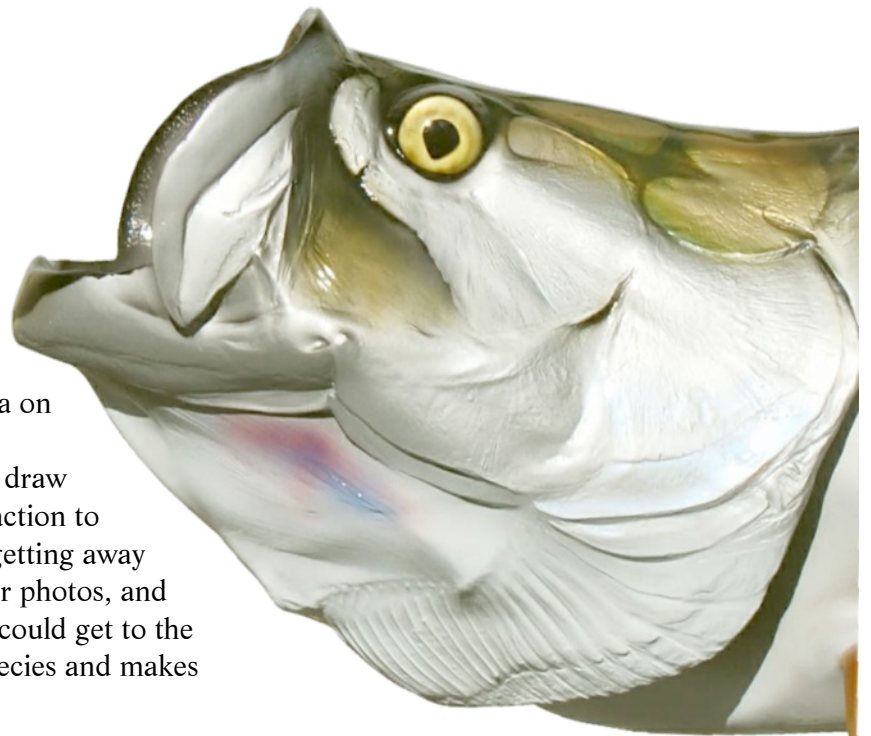
Impressive club numbers include Ken Holzhauser with 400+ and John Mester @ 600+.

Jerry loves sharing the experience with fellow club members. While his personal count is currently *89 short of 1,000*, his count on board the "Sea Caper" is almost 1,700. From fishing Baja to giant Tuna in the canyons off New Jersey's coast, to Marlin, Swordfish, a 1200# Great White, and to Tarpon fishing in SW Florida, some were just born with the gift. Jerry has "The gift."

One of the best parts of Tarpon fishing is the by-catch. There's a good chance of a Sawfish, Cobia, and even an occasional Shark showing themselves. As far as the club itself, Jerry talked a lot about what has changed over the years. Club rules (if you want to qualify your catches) require circle hooks and the release of all fish. They also don't count smaller fish. To qualify for the club it has to exceed 50#.

The Tarpon Hunters have clinics open to the public about safe fishing, (if a Tarpon jumps in your boat you're in trouble), rigs and tackle, and techniques about getting the fish to the boat as quick as possible so it has the energy to safely return to the sea. Everything in the club is about preserving the species for future Tarpon fishermen.

Jerry said, "If you want an impressive number of releases, it's important to have fellow tarpon fishermen to learn



from." Every year members learn new technique and share it with the club. They share information, tactics, and even radio each other when they're on a "bite". It's a great group to be part of. Public invite below:

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*Tarpon Rank as the top Sports Game Fish in Florida. The Cape Coral Tarpon Hunters Club will hold an introductory public presentation for prospective members on Thursday February 15th at 7:00pm at the Cape Coral Yacht Club- 5819 Driftwood Parkway, Cape Coral. The presentation is free and open to the public.*

*As the club enters its 47th season, its members have caught over 10,000 tarpon and it welcomes the chance to introduce new members to this exciting pastime.*

*During the introductory meeting, guests can learn the history of the largest tarpon fishing club in the world, gain knowledge about the "Silver King" and learn how the club promotes ethical Tarpon catch and release. Subsequent meetings will provide members with detailed instructions on rod/reel selection, terminal tackle rigging, bait prep and on-water etiquette necessary to get your name in the club's record books.*

*Monthly club meetings offer the opportunity to interact with world-class Tarpon fishermen and women, and feature presentations by local Tarpon fishing experts on a variety of Tarpon fishing techniques suitable for use in local waters.*

*For more information on the Cape Coral Tarpon Hunters Club, please check out our website: [www.CapeCoralTarponHunters.com](http://www.CapeCoralTarponHunters.com)*