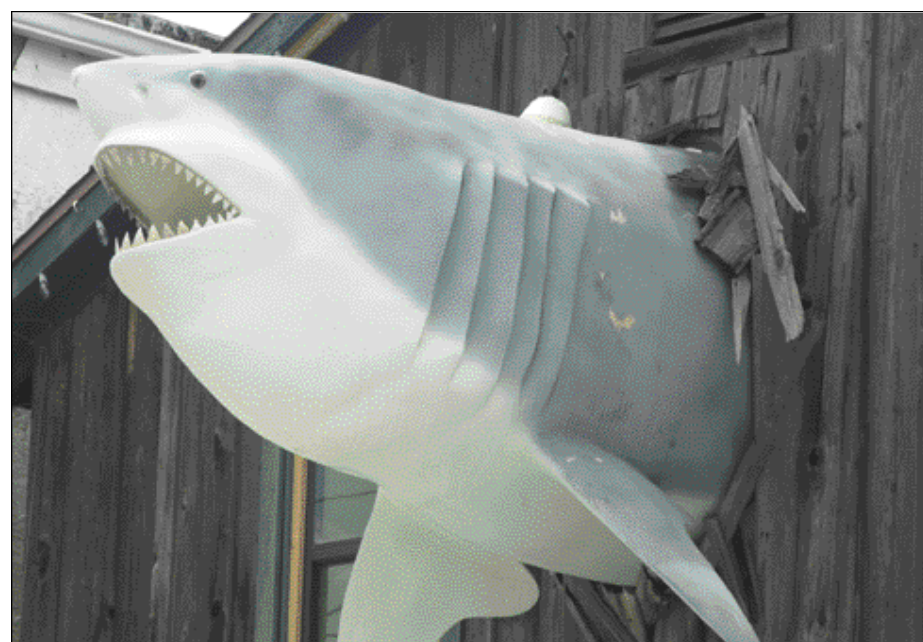


■ **SHARKS EVEN CRASH** through walls over the boardwalk at John's Pass, right.

■ **A LITTLE GIRL**, below, reaches tentatively toward a ball python at Sunken Gardens.



FIRST PERSON IN
FLORIDA

Story and photographs by
MICKEY SANBORN

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — I must confess, I started this photo story with a preconception — Florida is "Tacky." Some areas, John's Pass for example, do nothing to dispell this thought.

Cocoa Beach, where I lived some twenty years ago, had placed that picture firmly in my mind. It, after all, is home to Ron Jon's, which is constantly expanding, and may cover all of Brevard County by now.

I thought my only problem would be in editing the vast quantity of tacky photos of subjects available in all directions.

Thank God for John's Pass. The pink sea shell dancers, the sharks coming out of building walls, gaudy water bikes, they are all there.

I was happy with this mental picture until I followed a reporter's suggestion and went to Sunken Gardens. The place is actually very well done.

The city of St. Petersburg bought the whole thing from the Turner family for \$2.6 million in February, 1999.

It reopened in January, and is in the process of rebuilding the Turner collection.

Thousands of butterflies flutter about, lush tropical plants tower above, parrots screech; the place is really well done. Kinda ruined my whole tacky theme.

The park rangers do tours several times each day, very informative.

But, I'm not ready to give up yet.

I will make it my duty to search Florida at every opportunity for tackiness.

It is a dirty job, but someone has to search out the lawn flamingos.



■ **ONE OF THE COLORFUL PARROTS** above, is put through its paces in one of three shows daily.

■ **PARK RANGER** Donna Heinrich, left, shows a variety of reptiles during her part of the show.

■ **A PIRATE'S PEELING NOSE** graces the entrance to the John's Pass boardwalk.

■ **"TACKY" IS ALIVE** and well, right, at John's Pass, where a giant crab perches above this restaurant.

