

Power Lunch: Joe's synonymous with deals over lunch

By [Julie Kay](#)



Joe's Stone Crab



Joe's lunch special
Photo by Julie Kay



Grilled artichoke
Photo by Julie Kay

It's a Friday at Joe's Stone Crab, power lunch day at the restaurant that has personified power lunch in Miami's elite circles for decades.

At one table, former Florida Bar president and Greenberg Traurig partner Alan Dimond is lunching with his best friend of 40 years, former American Bar Association president and Boies Schiller & Flexner partner Stephen Zack, and son, Scott Dimond of Dimond Kaplan & Rothstein in Miami. They're celebrating the senior Dimond's birthday and end their meal with a piece of cake with a candle and song.

At the next table, **Joe Serota, a founding partner of Weiss Serota Helfman Pastoriza Cole & Boniske**, is breaking bread with Miami attorney Robert Hertzberg, general counsel for Joe's and a friend for two decades.

Today, the "family tables" at the center of the main dining room are reserved for Miami's power brokers. They are occupied by U.S. District Judge Ursula Ungaro, former Florida Bar president Miles McGrane III, former Miami Heat player Alonzo Mourning, Mount Sinai Medical Center CEO Steve Sonenreich and Miami Beach Police Chief Raymond Martinez. Rubbing elbows with the most powerful lawyers, lobbyists, judges, tycoons and

celebrities in Miami doesn't come cheap, but Joe's delivers. Patrons call it some of the best food around, including Joe's famous stone crabs, fried chicken, Lyonnaise potatoes, clam chowder, grilled tomatoes and, of course, the key lime pie that is so beloved people have it flown in from around the world.

"It's a power lunch-type place that's always a lot of fun," Serota said. "At the end of a tough week it's a fun place to celebrate. Besides the food being good, the waiters are very friendly and professional. More than anything it's a great place to see people you know and do some reminiscing."

The catch is, unless you are truly a mover and shaker, you may not be able to get a reservation and may have to wait two hours to eat. On Valentine's Day, diners waited four hours to be seated.

Table Of One's Own

In Miami, where new restaurants seem to pop up weekly, Joe's is no flash in the pan. The iconic eatery got its start 100 years ago when Hungarian immigrant Joe Weiss and his wife opened a small Miami Beach lunch counter and served up fish sandwiches.

It wasn't until 1921 that Joe's started serving stone crab, which no one even thought were edible until a Harvard University scientist encouraged the owner to give it a try. The shellfish were served with hash browns, cole slaw and mayonnaise for \$1.25. An instant hit was born.

Joe's son Jesse propelled Joe's into the limelight. A self-described "character," Jesse attracted VIPs like Will Rogers, Gloria Swanson, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Joseph Kennedy and J. Edgar Hoover. In the late 1980s, Joe's began catering to out-of-town VIPs when the eatery ramped up its take-away service. Celebrities like Quincy Jones, Frank Sinatra and Ted Kennedy started ordering custom, cooler boxes of crab, key lime pie and other dishes, shipped overnight by plane.

Today, Joe's is known as the consummate power lunch spot in town even though it's across the bay from downtown Miami, but the drive doesn't discourage diners.

That's certainly the case for Michael Abrams, a lobbyist at Akerman Senterfitt and former state representative. Abrams is such a regular at Joe's — lunching there 10 times a month for 30 years — that he became the only person to get his own table. Five years ago for his 60th birthday, Abrams received a surprise present from Joe's when the management put a plaque with his name on his favorite table.

Abrams, co-chair of Akerman's government affairs and public policy group, said he has closed many a business deal at Joe's and landed two of his biggest clients — Magic City Casino and Ameresco Inc., a Massachusetts-based renewable energy company — over lunch.

"Everyone from out of town knows about Joe's," he said. "If I'm trying to land a client and they're coming in from out of town, I always go there. Meals are a very important part of business development."

On Fridays, you can usually find Abrams there, holding court at his table. "You can touch a lot of bases on a Friday," he remarked.

Crab Bag

On a recent Friday, I stopped by Joe's for my very first visit with a current and former colleague. We started the meal with Stuffy's Rhode Island style, baked stuffed Quahog clams served with drawn butter, and marinated grilled artichoke with lemon boursin dip. These appetizers were the highlight of the meal for me.

The best bargain on the menu at \$5.95 is a half broiled chicken with a side of skinny fried sweet potato fries. The \$32.95 classic lunch special includes three claws, half an order of cole slaw, half an order of creamed spinach, a small order of hash browns and a slice of key lime pie.

I had the Shrimp Louis salad — chopped iceberg lettuce with shrimp, peppers, garbanzo beans, chopped egg, black olives and Louis dressing for \$13.95. The salad was so big I needed a doggie bag. To tell the truth, I really just wanted a Joe's bag with the iconic red crab on it.

We were sitting next to Zack and Dimond, and Zack insisted on handing me a piece of fried chicken, saying, "You gotta taste this."

Zack has been frequenting Joe's since he was 14 years old and knows most of the staff. He insists he does not frequent Joe's because of its power lunch reputation but because of the service and food.

"I didn't know what a power lunch spot was in junior high," he cracked. "The food is always good, and I'm never disappointed. People think it's expensive, but it happens to be the most reasonable place to go in town. We have our office Christmas party there every year."

When asked whether he might follow in the steps of the late television anchorwoman Ann Bishop and have his ashes scattered in front of Joe's, Zack quipped, "No, I want my ashes scattered at Neiman Marcus so my wife visits."