

YOLO finds success where others have failed

by Julie Kay
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YOLO, where billionaire H. Wayne Huizenga has his own table, is the undisputed power lunch capital in downtown Fort Lauderdale.

The eatery opened in a seemingly prime spot at 333 E. Las Olas Blvd. in 2008. But where five other restaurants flopped, including the Dancing Bear and Brasserie Las Olas, YOLO is wildly successful at lunch, dinner, happy hour and Sunday brunch.

Co-owner Tim Petrillo, who also opened the Vibe nightclub next door as well as the Tarpon Bend restaurants, credits "density."

"Several office buildings were built nearby and 5,000 condominium units within walking distance were delivered to us," he said. "So long as we serve a quality consistent product at a reasonable price, we will be successful."

In fact, YOLO has attained such a lunch following among the power brokers of Broward County that many say a reservation is necessary these days, although Petrillo insists he keeps half the tables available for walk-ins.

"I never have to wait because we always make a reservation on opentable.com," said Peter Quinter, a partner with GrayRobinson. He usually walks from his office across the street. "It's great for lunch and happy hour and very convenient for anyone working in downtown Fort Lauderdale. I take both clients and colleagues. It's service with a smile there; the servers are always super friendly."

The most popular lunch dish is the fish special, with salads and the "old-school burger" next, Petrillo said. Servers stamp the specials on a sheet of butcher-block paper covering tables. One caveat: sometimes the specials run out early. The tuna burger, for example, sold out by 12:30 p.m. on a recent day.

"We only grind a limited number of them and if a table of seven all orders it, it can go quickly," Petrillo explained.

My suggestion to the server was: grind more! I had the turkey burger instead, which was barbecue-basted and served with avocado, Monterey jack cheese, grilled onions and chipotle mayonnaise.

Joseph Goldstein, a Fort Lauderdale partner with Shutts & Bowen, lunches at YOLO once every two weeks and recently celebrated with client Bergeron



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Land Development Inc. after it won a government contract.

"I usually have the fish of the day, but if my arm is twisted or I have exercised in the morning, I love the homemade truffled potato chips with bleu cheese and the banana-coconut cream pie with the cashew graham crust for dessert," Goldstein said. "It's the place to see others and be seen — free publicity just walking in the door."

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Other power players who frequent the restaurant are Fort Lauderdale Mayor Jack Seiler, Broward County Mayor John Rodstrom, newly appointed United Way of Broward County CEO Kathleen Cannon, developer Terry Stiles and Miami Dolphins owner Stephen Ross, who Goldstein observed lunching with Huizenga. "Maybe they closed the sale of the Dolphins there," Goldstein quipped.

Jamie Cole, managing partner of the Fort Lauderdale office of Weiss Serota

Helfman Pastoriza Cole & Boniske, is a weekly regular, holding business meetings with clients and business associates. He almost always orders the rotisserie chicken with herb mashed potatoes.

"I like that they are quick," he said. "I can usually get in and out in an hour. Also, it's not so loud that you can't have a business meeting."

Another attribute, according to Cole, is parking in the attached garage and getting the parking stub validated.

Gunster frequently holds political events at the restaurant, said Martin Press, a partner at the law firm where former U.S. Senator George LeMieux is chairman.

"It definitely seems to be the most popular place in town," said Press, who orders the grilled chicken salad and iced tea.

The restaurant has a main dining room, bar seating and a large outdoor patio, which includes a cozy grouping of red sofas and chairs surrounding an open fire pit — perfect for happy hour get-togethers.

When Beverly Pohl, chair of the statewide appellate practice at Broad and Cassel, hit a milestone birthday (which she declined to name), she rented the back room and threw a party last year. More than 65 people helped her celebrate with an open bar and buffet.

Brittany Wallman, veteran political reporter at the Sun Sentinel, often meets sources for lunch at YOLO — and sometimes glean news



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YOLO is succeeding where five other restaurants have flopped.

tips just by observing "who is lunching with who." She "adores" the Szechuan calamari marinated in garlic chili sauce, chopped peanuts and sesame.

"The place is full of power lunchers," Wallman said. "It's also owned by a power luncher, who's vice chairman of the Downtown Development Authority. Maybe part of the reason behind the restaurant's success is that the power lunch crowd are friends of his."

Julie Kay can be reached at (305) 347-6685.

YOLO

333 E. Las Olas Blvd.

Fort Lauderdale

www.yolorestaurant.com

Dining hours:

* 11:30 a.m.-11 p.m.

Monday-Thursday

* 11:30 a.m.-midnight Friday

* Noon-midnight Saturday

* 11:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Sunday



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Oak-grilled salmon