

CNPA

Newsletter Entry: "Full Belly Files," by Matt Kettmann, *Santa Barbara Independent*

Dear CNPA Judges,

In June 2021, after witnessing the sustained success of our daily headline newsletter over numerous years, the *Santa Barbara Independent* launched a large slate of niche newsletters, covering topics from arts & entertainment to real estate.

First out of the gates was "Full Belly Files," a weekly report by our senior editor and primary food & drink writer Matt Kettmann. It quickly became our top-performing newsletter, and continues to lead the pack. Today, Full Belly Files is approaching 8,200 subscribers and enjoys a 57.8% average open rate, more than double the email marketing industry's target for "effective" newsletters.

Every Friday, Kettmann "serves up multiple courses of food & drink coverage, going off-menu from our regularly published content to deliver tasty nuggets of restaurant, recipe, and refreshment wisdom to your inbox." The includes a mix of behind-the-scenes reportage, insightful analysis of restaurant trends and news based on his more than 20 years covering the region, and, perhaps most popular, personal tales from his life eating, drinking, and cooking.

The goal of Full Belly Files was to tell stories that don't fit in the typical feature article format, and to demystify the practice of food & drink coverage at the *Independent*. It's also been a format for Kettmann to bring the reporting he does for other publications to a Santa Barbara audience, and to cover his food & drink-related travels around the country and world. And it does this all in near-real time, instead of the usual weeks-to-months delay that can occur on traditional article publishing.

Past newsletters have included an explanation of how restaurants should approach the newspaper if they want coverage; a rundown of the varying ways that Kettmann approaches writing a restaurant article; reflections on the sales of iconic restaurants and wineries; and even an odes to tongs, sausages, and French onion dip.

The direct and immediate feedback from readers, both online and in-person, is unlike anything that Kettmann has experienced in his extensive career at the paper, which included many years of news reporting, arts coverage, and more since he started as a proofreader back in 1999. Who knew that more people would react to Kettmann's off-the-cuff thoughts about the latest restaurant and silly tales from his kitchen than they would to his long-form features about sustainability, land use, and county planning?

By showing readers a refreshingly real side of food & drink journalism, Full Belly Files is expanding the *Santa Barbara Independent* brand and engaging our readers like never before.

[A Week in the Life of Me:](https://www.independent.com/2022/03/03/full-belly-files-a-week-in-the-life-of-me-stars-of-the-rhone-valley/)

<https://www.independent.com/2022/03/03/full-belly-files-a-week-in-the-life-of-me-stars-of-the-rhone-valley/>

[Is French Onion Dip My Family Dish? :](https://www.independent.com/2022/12/07/full-belly-files-is-french-onion-dip-my-family-dish/)

<https://www.independent.com/2022/12/07/full-belly-files-is-french-onion-dip-my-family-dish/>

[COVID Finally Caught Me:](https://www.independent.com/2022/12/21/full-belly-files-covid-finally-caught-me/)

<https://www.independent.com/2022/12/21/full-belly-files-covid-finally-caught-me/>