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ALERT TOP STORY

## Richmond's BK Fulton on reinventing himself as producer, storyteller with ties to Broadway and Hollywood

Bill Lohmann

Mar 2, 2023



BK Fulton, retired Verizon executive, talks about his mission with his Soulidify Productions, which makes a difference by, in part, telling previously untold stories of achievers.

B. Keith “BK” Fulton is a retired corporate executive who instead of easing into a life of leisure has, in only a few years, transformed himself into an industrious and influential media entrepreneur with a hand in producing films, books and Broadway plays. He’s even writing music.

Unlikely a path as it might seem, Fulton says he planned it all out.

No, seriously, he did.

Back in the 1980s when he was a struggling engineering student at Virginia Tech, Fulton went to the library to “plan his escape” from school; he wound up planning the rest of his life.

In the library, as he began to research other life options, he found himself in the E-185 section among books about Black history. There, he became acquainted with and enthralled by people of history and achievement — people who looked like him — but people whose stories had been unknown to him.

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BK Fulton, who grew up in Hampton, set a goal of producing or co-producing at least 70 films before he's done; he's already on No. 20.

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“At first, I was angry that I was not told about the new things I was reading,” he said.

“Then I realized my teachers did not know, either.

“I then wrote my plan and got to work.”

He became more engaged as a student, and his purpose in life came into clearer focus. He went on to earn a law degree from New York Law School and make his way into the corporate world. The blueprint he crafted as a re-energized student has gone largely according to plan. Not down to every minute detail, but enough so that he's right where he thinks he ought to be – telling the sorts of stirring, under-told stories that inspired him all those years ago.

He likes to say he spent the first 50 years of his life “doing what I was trained to do,” building a career that led him to a series of senior corporate leadership positions, ultimately president of Verizon Virginia and West Virginia and vice president of the Mid-Atlantic region for Verizon Communications, until retiring just before he turned 50.

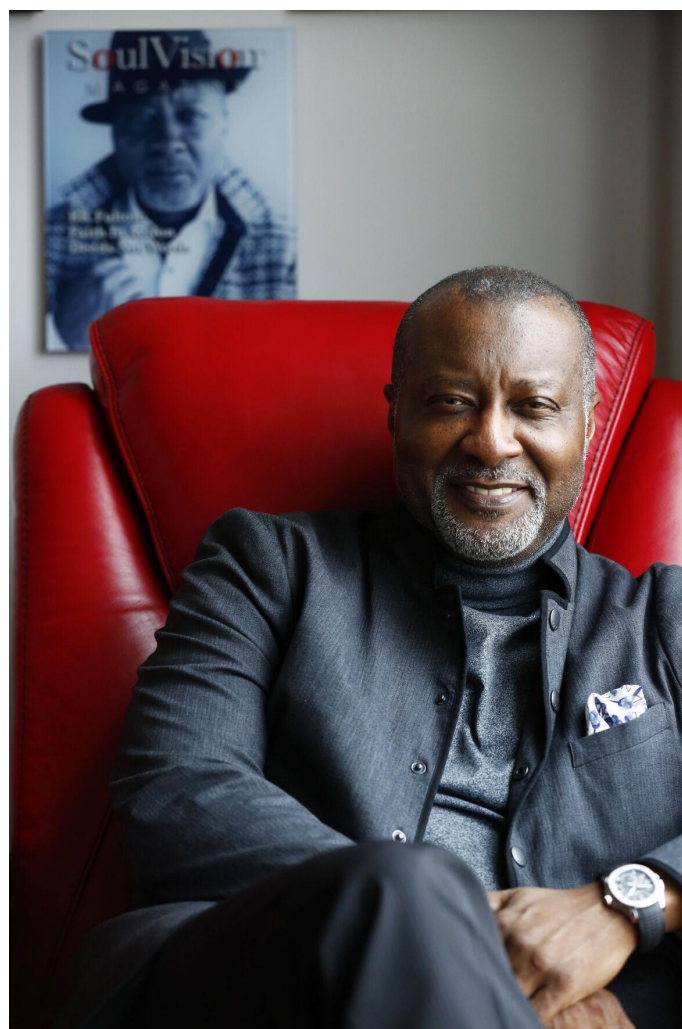
And now?

“I am doing what I was made to do, ... and I’m really just getting started.”

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**In 2017, Fulton founded Soulidify Productions**, a Richmond-based media and investment company that financially backs projects that often bring overlooked stories — and people — to light. **Soulidify** has a mission of supporting multigenerational, multiethnic voices and stories from throughout history.

“If you want young people to be the best version of themselves, to be wildly successful, one of the ways we do it ... is you give them examples of other people who have done likewise,” he said. “But with brown kids and women, we’re just much slower to it. Some of that comes from a racist history — it didn’t fit the narrative,



Following a plan for his life he set in motion as a struggling engineering student at Virginia Tech, BK Fulton went on to earn a law degree and hold corporate leadership positions before producing films and



wasn't deemed important — but what we're finding is there's always been this tradition of excellence and this tradition of allies.

plays, authoring children's books, composing music — among other things — in his quest to make a difference.

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“We all share this same rock. We are all warmed by the same sun. We all need the atmosphere to be healthy, to sustain generations, so we're in this together. But if we don't appreciate the truth of that, the rightness of that, then we can get lost in these false narratives, ... and that's where we start to get into trouble and wasting time. And I want to help us get past that, and art is the way to do it.”

Or, as he put it, “If getting the right information and the right books can put my life on rocket boosters, what would happen if I put them on the big screen with great actors, great music and great scripts? Then maybe I could change lives and generations and not just for a kid that looked like me, but everybody.”



Awards for the film "1 Angry Black Man," which BK Fulton produced, are displayed in his home. Fulton will have an executive-producer credit for "The Kill Room," a comedic thriller that reunites "Pulp Fiction" stars Samuel L. Jackson and Uma Thurman." It's due out by September.

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The ever-upbeat Fulton, 57, who grew up in Hampton, set a goal of producing or co-producing at least 70 films before he's done; he's already on No. 20. His most recent executive-producer credit is for "Freedom's Path," the story of a Union soldier rescued by a free Black man and his friends who work in the Underground Railroad.

"Freedom's Path" was written and directed by Brett Smith, who describes Fulton as "one of those rare individuals you come across in life who is filled with an artist's level of passion, but is always able to maintain perspective and a grounded sense of logic and common sense.

"His passion and creativity drives him toward projects and work that truly matter, yet he never loses sight of the business obligations and needs of each project," Smith wrote in an email. "On top of that, he is just an incredible person and a joy to be around and learn from."

The largest film project Souldifly has been involved with, "The Kill Room," a comedic thriller reuniting Samuel L. Jackson and Uma Thurman for the first time since "Pulp Fiction," is due out by September, said Fulton, who will have an executive-producer credit.

He's written the script for what he thinks will be his "magnum opus," the story of North Carolina State University's unexpected run to the national basketball championship in 1983. Fulton co-wrote "Final Four: The Miracle Season" with a member of that team, Dereck Whittenburg, and is now shopping it to studios.

The story "highlights the power of media; it highlights the hard work, determination, perseverance and redemption and also communities working together. The sweet spot of the kind of stories I want to tell and use to inspire people," he said.

On Broadway, Fulton was an investor in “Thoughts of a Colored Man,” a story of seven Black men and their perspectives on what it means to be Black men in the 21st century that proved to be a hit – until COVID-19 hit and the show was forced to close.

Last year, Soulidifly backed a Broadway revival of August Wilson’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play “The Piano Lesson,” starring Jackson and directed by his wife, LaTanya Richardson Jackson. The show became the highest-grossing Wilson play in history on Broadway and the highest-grossing revival of a play in Broadway history before it closed in January, according to Broadway World.

Fulton is currently co-writing a musical based on a true story about Wilson’s life. Writing music is not entirely new for Fulton, who says there’s no reason for people to be one-dimensional. (“I don’t really give a high observance to limits; if any person has done it, then I just figure out how to do it if I need to do it,” he says.) He has a song on iTunes, “Will You,” which he wrote and sang for his wife, Jackie. Jacquelyn E. Stone, an attorney and partner at McGuireWoods law firm, also is executive vice president and chief legal officer of Soulidifly. Fulton calls her “my muse and a superstar in her own right.”

“My wife will tell you I just wake up in the middle of the night humming,” he said. “I keep a pen by the bed, and I’ll write something down. [Tunes] come to me, and I write them down and get the melody. Then I’ll give it to people who can write sheet music to actually add notes to it.”



In 2017, retired Verizon executive BK Fulton, seen here in his screening room in Richmond, launched Souldifly Productions, a media and investment company that backs projects that often bring overlooked stories and people to light.

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He adds, “I’m teaching myself to play piano so I can help them.”

Besides all of that, Souldifly has published more than a dozen books, including a series of children’s books based on Fulton’s life that “celebrates curiosity, reading, learning. Telling kids it’s ... good to be you.”

But that’s not all.

He’s a member of the board of **MediaU.com**, an online film school aimed at helping aspiring “media makers,” as Fulton has called them, break through in the film and television industry. Founder and CEO Adam Leipzig, a former senior executive at



Walt Disney Studios, brought Fulton onto the board because “it was clear from BK’s commitment to storytelling, media equity, democratization of skills and social justice that he would be an extraordinary addition to our group.”

Fulton’s background as a corporate executive is outstanding, Leipzig said in a phone interview, but “what really is extraordinary about BK is his positive attitude. He is always encouraging and expects and draws the best from people.”

He’s also “just a good dude,” says friend Stacy Spikes, founder of Urbanworld Film Festival and the founding CEO of **MoviePass**, a subscription-based ticket service for going to the movies that proved popular before it was taken over by a firm that eventually pushed him out.



BK Fulton, called a "Renaissance man" and "a good dude" with a positive attitude by friends and business associates, is shown on the cover of Hollywood Monthly magazine.

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Fulton had expressed an interest in investing in MoviePass before it got off the ground, but he proved to be too late. “But we stayed in touch,” Spikes said in a phone interview.

“When MoviePass burst into flames and I was kind of fired from my own company, ... BK was one of the first people who reached out to me in a very human way,” he recalled. “He was very kind.”

Over drinks at a hotel near Grand Central Terminal in New York in 2019, Fulton asked Spikes what he was working on, and Spikes told him about a new platform called PreShow Interactive. Fulton asked how much money he needed to get a patent on the necessary technology. Spikes told him, and Fulton immediately said he and Jackie would like to invest.

In his new book, “Black Founder: The Hidden Power of Being an Outsider,” Spikes recalled how Fulton leaned across the table and said, “Brother, we have to make sure you get back in the ring. It’s very important that you keep going, and don’t let this stop you.”

The money arrived the following week. Spikes, who brought MoviePass out of bankruptcy and is relaunching it, remains moved by the gesture and amazed by Fulton’s second act of a career.

“I think he’s a true Renaissance man,” Spikes said. “He’s writing children’s books. He’s producing movies. He’s doing investment and finance. I sit there and say, ‘When do you sleep?’ I’m an entrepreneur running three businesses, and he makes me feel tired.”

Fulton acknowledges he doesn’t sleep as much as he should, often waking up after only three or four hours to write and read. But when people ask him why in the world he’s sending them notes at 3 or 4 in the morning, he likes to respond, “I work while you sleep so I can live like you dream.”