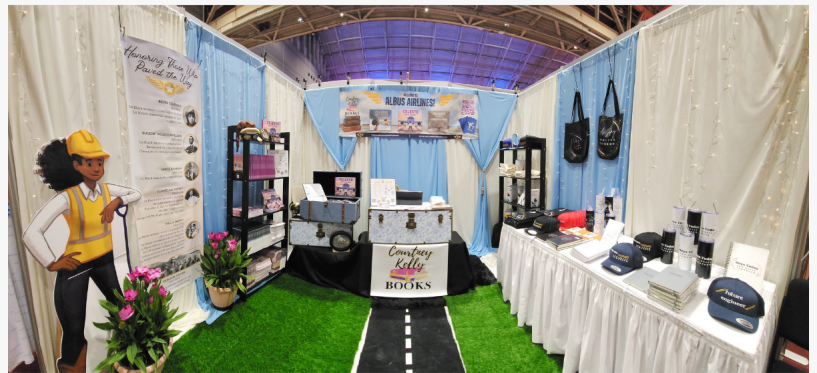


Essence Fest Propels Inspirational Kids' STEM Book

CELESTE PAVES THE WAY by Self-Published New Orleans Native Celebrates Gains From Exposure at the Annual Event

NEW ORLEANS, LA, UNITED STATES, August 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In the weeks leading up to the 2026 ESSENCE Festival of Culture (ESSENCE), self-published author and civil engineer, Courtney Kelly, had a feeling that this year would be different. Born and raised in New Orleans, Courtney was not new ESSENCE, and as a past official vendor, she knew what to expect when preparing for the event. Leveraging lessons learned and skills gained through the completion of the New Voices Foundation's Madam CJ Walker Institute PACE Bootcamp, a business accelerator program, her foresight proved true as she celebrates the success of the three-day festival.

Timing the release of her new aviation-focused book, [Celeste Paves the Way](#), during the week of ESSENCE allowed the themes of travel and flight to take center stage at the Courtney Kelly Books booth within WeLoveUs The Marketplace, a shopping destination created to support emerging Black-owned businesses. In *Celeste Paves the Way*, readers are taken to Atlanta, Georgia where Celeste, a young civil engineer, is working on paving a new runway to replace aging infrastructure and accommodate larger aircraft. It offers a behind-the-scenes look at what goes into the design and construction of a critical element of what makes airports work while showcasing careers in the aviation industry and honoring aviation pioneers.



Panoramic view of the Courtney Kelly Books booth in the WeLoveUs Marketplace at Essence Festival 2026



Courtney stands next to the Founder Feature Wall installation at the New Voices Village during ESSENCE Fest 2026

To bring the book to life, travel cases were used as the checkout counter, a propeller-shaped clock adorned a bookshelf, and a pilot's hat and goggles were placed right next to a tribute banner featuring facts about lesser-known aviation trailblazers. This banner added an educational element as guests looked around the Courtney Kelly Books shop. Courtney and her team also used method dressing to add to the booth's dynamism by becoming pilots, flight attendants, and passengers during the days of the festival.



Courtney Kelly (far right) shares the stage with fellow panelists and the moderator during an enlightening discussion at ESSENCE Festival 2026

These additional touches and the book's inclusion on the shelves within the ESSENCE Authors area led to nearly one hundred copies of the new title being sold in three days. New Orleans based bookstore, [Community Book Center](#), was this year's official bookseller and its recent designation as a reporter for the New York Times added to the magnitude of Celeste Paves the Way's inclusion in this coveted area of the festival.

When not at the booth, Courtney could be found on stage or featured in activations across the venue listed below. Her speaking engagements were captured and are now available on [YouTube](#) as well.

- ESSENCE Authors | ESSENCE Book Festival •

Interview "From New Orleans to the Page: Engineering Dreams and Telling Our Stories": Courtney's journey from a Katrina Kid to civil engineer turned author is explored during this engaging interview

- New Voices Village •

Founder Feature: During a 40-minute session, attendees were able to hear directly from Courtney and ask any questions about Courtney Kelly Books

Founders Wall Feature: Courtney was selected as one of eight founders to be featured in the New Voices Village alongside a quote about her experience with New Voices programming at ESSENCE Fest

Product Display: This provided an opportunity for festivalgoers to view books and select merchandise from Courtney Kelly Books while visiting the New Voices Village

- WeLoveUs The Marketplace Stage •

Founder Panel "From Story to Streams: How Black Women Are Turning Narrative Into Income": Courtney shared the stage with moderator Anayo Awuzie, founder of Carefree Media, and

panelists Aisata Diallo, founder of Tressfecta, and Imani Garner, founder of Ethos Sync, for an impactful discussion about how identifying a pain point and discovering a solution can lead to a sustainable and profitable business

Founder Showcase: On two separate occasions, Courtney showcased her products and shared the driving forces behind why she decided to become an author and the significance of paving the way for others along her journey

Courtney Kelly Books continues to leverage this momentum through international awareness campaigns and upcoming speaking engagements. To learn more and find out where Courtney will be next, subscribe and follow @courtneykellybooks on all social media or at www.courtneykellybooks.com

About Author Courtney Kelly, MBA, PE

Born and raised in New Orleans, award-winning civil engineer Courtney Kelly has made a name for herself as a well-respected construction management professional and accomplished self-published children's book author. Courtney holds Bachelor of Science degrees in civil engineering and math, as well as a master's degree in civil engineering from Southern Methodist University (SMU). She also holds an MBA from Lamar University and is a licensed professional engineer in the state of Texas. Her self-published children's books, *Celeste Saves the City*, *Celeste Tunnels Underground*, and *Celeste Paves the Way*, have been translated into three languages and sold in over 16 countries. In addition to sitting on several advisory boards, she is an adjunct professor at SMU, teaching civil and environmental engineering courses.

About Courtney Kelly Books

Courtney Kelly Books is on a mission to empower and inspire people of all ages through our books and STEM-themed merchandise based on *Celeste*, a young civil engineer who encourages girls and kids of color to see themselves in underrepresented fields. During author visits to schools and organizations, we effectively weave storytelling sessions with educational workshops to create an experience that leaves students motivated to dream big. We support aspiring authors with consultations, seminars, and workshops, providing game-changing resources that lead to success. Driven by her accomplished career as an engineer and entrepreneur, Courtney's dynamic speaking engagements deliver insight and impact to audiences of all sizes.

Imprint: Courtney Kelly Books

On sale: June 30, 2026

Price: \$19.99

Pages: 32

ISBN: 979-8-9903082-6-8

Courtney Kelly

Courtney Kelly Books

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