LOCAL “SHERO”, KATHY PHIFER, IMPACTS FORT COLLINS COMMUNITY FOR 30 YEARS (AND COUNTING)

BY AMANDA CLAYTON

Women and Philanthropy member Kathy Phifer has supported our community for decades. First, while working at the Fort Collins Coloradoan, then with the Downtown Business Association, and finally, a long career at Colorado State University. Many have felt her giving spirit throughout the years, and it has specifically sparked a back-to-school philanthropy movement that has lasted for decades and will continue for decades to come.

School is Cool was launched in 1991 by Phifer and coworker Lauren Donley because they noticed numerous students at their children's elementary school without school supplies. Flash-forward to today, the program annually provides more than 2,800 backpacks full of grade-appropriate, high-quality school supplies to students in the Poudre School District.

“So many successful years [29] are indicative of the compassion and giving spirit of our community: generous hearts, volunteers, and donors,” said Phifer. “It is truly a project raised by a village.”

School is Cool provides benefits beyond academic support. Students receiving school supplies are instilled with self-confidence, knowing they are on the same playing field as their peers. Many have told Phifer that receiving these supplies has significantly changed their lives.

“While Fort Collins is the ‘best city to live in America,’ there are many people not afforded the same opportunities that others have. Some families are struggling every single day,” explained Phifer. “For example, PSD has 8,100 students on the free- and reduced-lunch program. So, while we provide 2,800 backpacks, there is still a great need out there.”

No matter where life takes you, it’s important to remember there will always be people and
organizations in need of support.

“You really need to take a step back, pause, and think how did I get where I am, and you really need to pay it forward, because that’s what keeps this world going,” said Phifer.

Living this mantra, Phifer and her family support numerous nonprofit organizations in Colorado and across the country. Phifer also encourages her peers to get involved with the Women and Philanthropy community at CSU.

“Women and Philanthropy is so important,” said Phifer. “It’s truly an honor to be involved with a program that so broadly recognizes philanthropy. I’ve seen it in action in so many ways – and every single time, it better the community of Fort Collins.”

Women and Philanthropy at Colorado State University connects and empowers a broad community to elevate women in their philanthropic efforts. The program recognizes the power of women and strives to connect them with their passions at CSU so that, through philanthropy, the world’s biggest challenges are solved.

“I recently read that 86% of household consumer purchasing decisions are made by women,” said Phifer. “To me, that means that women have a tremendous power on how and where philanthropy donations should be spent.”

As Phifer explains, women are truly a force to be reckoned with when it comes to giving, doing, and getting things done.

“We all should be so loud and proud about having this program, and continue to grow and demonstrate its impact.”

As Phifer prepares to retire, she reflects back on memorable moments at CSU. Some of these include Tom Sutherland’s homecoming celebration in Moby Arena after he was freed from captivity in Beirut; CSUNITE, when the community came together to support inclusivity for all on campus; School is Cool and its many successful years; and, most importantly, the people she’s met along the way.

“It’s the people who have made the most impactful, memorable moments,” said Phifer. “I have been so fortunate to have built a community of friends and
RAMily that will last a lifetime. We care deeply about each other. My friends and coworkers have supported me, lifted me up, and cared about my family. This place is so special like that.”

In addition to the relationships built, Phifer’s time at CSU has provided great work-life balance, allowing her to spend quality time with family, challenging and rewarding projects, opportunities to collaborate with different people across the University, and continuous learning opportunities. It has been a fulfilling journey that has allowed her to grow and flourish.

“I feel like my years at CSU have truly been the best education I could have ever imagined,” said Phifer. “I have been pushed to learn things foreign to me while being able to apply my skills and talents to make a difference with a project or a person. All the various roles I’ve held at CSU have shaped me into the person I am today – both personally and professionally. It’s truly been the best job I could have ever asked for.”

While she may be retiring from her official job, this is just the beginning of an exciting and wonderful life for Phifer.

“Our heartfelt gratitude to Kathy for her selfless dedication to CSU and our community. Kathy’s philanthropic heart truly embodies the mission of Women and Philanthropy. She is a shero in our hearts, and we wish her the very best in her new endeavors,” said Colleen Meyer, managing director of donor relations and stewardship.