

# Stephanie Wanek '77

A conversation with one of Cathedral's first female students

BY CHRIS STARR

Stephanie Wanek '77 was among the first cohort of female students when Cathedral went co-ed in 1974 and has continued to blaze trails ever since—both as an avid hiker in Colorado, where she has lived for more than 30 years, and as a professional working at the intersection of gender, technology, and academia.

Wanek is currently the Assistant Director of Operations for ATLAS Institute at University of Colorado Boulder—an interdisciplinary program within the College of Engineering and Applied Science—where she works with strategy, space planning, logistics, and growth accommodation in their degree programs. She has also served as Program Manager for the National Center for Women & Information Technology, which partners with change leaders to provide research-based resources to increase the participation of girls, women, and underrepresented communities in computing.

She recently shared reflections and memories of her time at Cathedral, noting, “As a member of the school’s many alumni, I think the school draws from an amazing history and continues to actively nurture rich traditions that unite and bring people together.”



PHOTO: ELLIOT WHITEHEAD

**What do you most enjoy about your career?** I have worked at CU Boulder for 15 years and have been affiliated with the ATLAS Institute for most of that time. My building includes labs and studios focused on creative technologies and design. What’s unique about ATLAS is that it’s a community of polymaths interested in broadening technology and creativity in radically new ways. There are dancers working with sensors and lights to create new ways of capturing movement; musicians using augmented and virtual reality technologies to synchronize remote drum circles; computer scientists who



**The Cathedral School Class of 1977:**  
“As a member of the school’s many alumni, I think the school draws from an amazing history and continues to actively nurture rich traditions that unite and bring people together,” says Stephanie Wanek (circled).

work with drones and robots; and crafters who work with electronics to create smart textiles. It’s a community that bridges multiple disciplines, and the outcome is amazing! Our academic programs attract really interesting students who mesh multiple interests. It’s a vibrant community to be a part of, and CU Boulder is an inspiring place to work.

**What aspects of Cathedral’s educational program and student life were most engaging for you?**

I look back fondly at my time at The Cathedral School and am proud that I was part of the first group of five young women to graduate from the school in 1977 as it transitioned away from being an all-boys school. But it’s much more inspiring to see all the ways in which the school has evolved and grown since that time, while still nurturing a deep sense of community, social justice, and

commitment to inclusion and diversity. The most personally meaningful piece that I carry with me from Cathedral is a true love for choral music, so I love to see the continued commitment to music and the renowned choir program integrated with a very ecumenical Cathedral. I remember holiday services in the Cathedral with Christmas carols, full choirs, and the hallowed hall booming with an organ. It remains something that moves me to my core.

**As a graduate who has followed the school over the years, what are you particularly interested in as it relates to the school’s current program and mission?** I was excited to read about the school’s recent Expansion, as well as all the added resources that support student learning in areas such as science, technology, languages, and art. The teachers and

staff carrying out the educational mission of the school are so committed and enthusiastic! It’s wonderful to see children identifying things they see as problems and figuring out creative ways to find solutions or improvements. So many advancements at ATLAS came about because someone stopped to say, “But why?” or, “There’s got to be a way we can make that better.” The world has a lot of really big challenges. There are opportunities to make an impact on a big scale—like climate change; alternate energies; space travel; natural resources; social and humanitarian issues; and expanding access to health, education, or technology across global communities. All these things sound really big and insurmountable, but sometimes change starts with a bunch of people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives coming together and tinkering around with an idea.



**What else would you like our community to know?**

I’m proud to say that New York City is where I was born and raised, and I love to come back to the city from time to time. I even returned to visit The Cathedral School during a work trip several years ago. We are lucky to have lived in the beautiful Rocky Mountains for the past 30 years, and we enjoy a variety of activities, including hiking, biking, and goofing around with our dog Stanley.