

Chantal Weatherley-White Unfug '85

2020 DISTINGUISHED ALUM

BY ELYSE RUDOLPH

At the beginning of her senior year, Chantal Weatherley-White Unfug '85 thought her future was



in lacrosse. She was a standout player on the Kent Denver team and had a scholarship offer from the national-championship-winning women's team at the University of New Hampshire. She even dreamed of a career playing the sport professionally.

By the end of her senior year, Unfug had accepted a spot at Boston University, leaving her lacrosse stick at home in Denver.

"When you start your senior year to when you're finishing the year, you can really change as a person," she recalls. "As much as I loved Kent Denver, I didn't want to replicate my high school experience. I realized this was my chance to do something different."

For someone who'd always thought of herself as an athlete first, college was a big adjustment for Unfug. "I was very intellectually curious, but my grades weren't that great [at Kent Denver]. I just wasn't academically mature yet. At BU, I worked my tail off, and I proved to myself that I was smart. That just changed my self-confidence."

She declared a major in Communications, recognizing that no matter what career she pursued, the ability to speak and write clearly would be assets. Through extracurriculars, volunteer work, and internships—including writing for

the school magazine, interning with a senator in D.C., and volunteering with various political campaigns—she put her communications skills to work, but still didn't have a clear idea what she'd do after graduation.

At that point, she convened a meeting with her family, laughingly referring to it as the "What Can Chantal Do After College?" brainstorming session. They rated all of her options from least risky (move home, find a job in Denver) to most risky (live on a friend-of-a-friend's banana boat in the Caribbean). Ultimately, Unfug landed on a path somewhere between the two extremes: she moved to London and started pounding the pavement looking for a job.

"My father is from London, so I had dual citizenship, and I knew someone from a past internship whose father worked in public relations in London," Unfug shares. "My friend's dad sent me a list of PR firms in the city, and then I cold-called agencies and went door-to-door until I had a job offer."

After three years in London and ready for her next professional challenge, Unfug found herself at another decision point: "I had to ask myself if I wanted to get another job in the UK. If so, I knew Europe would probably be where I would stay permanently. I decided instead to move home to Denver."

Unfug was back to pounding the pavement, but with a clearer sense of what she wanted out of her next job: "I knew I didn't want to sell just anything. I wanted to do something that felt important." She decided to go into business with her father, founding a medical investment consulting firm and in the process, finding a passion for business development and small business ownership.

That passion led Unfug to volunteer with the National Association of Women Business Owners and accept a public policy seat on a local non-profit board, which sparked her interest in policy and lawmaking. Attending



Photos courtesy C. Unfug



a small business conference at the White House further stoked her interest in the public sector, leading Unfug to apply for a job in the Colorado governor's office. After landing that first job in government, Unfug never looked back, stating, "[Government] work is diverse, complex and intellectually satisfying. I get to focus on building relationships, building trust, and looking for opportunities to raise all boats in our state."

Unfug has now worked in government for over 20 years, including roles on Colorado's Western and Eastern slopes,



for governors, mayors, senators and commissioners, and in urban and rural communities. Among many positions, she served as the Director of the Women's Business Office with Governor Roy Romer and as the Manager of Denver Parks and Recreation under Denver Mayor Bill Vidal. On the national stage, Unfug led the planning efforts for the City and County of Denver when the city hosted the 2008 Democratic National Convention.

She currently serves as the Director of the Division of Local Government for the state of Colorado. In that role, she is the liaison between state and local governments, shepherding over \$250 million annually to strategically invest in more than 5,000 local community development and resilience projects. Unfug is particularly mindful of the impact policy-making can have on social justice and equity to ensure communities don't get left behind.



Given her years of service to the state of Colorado and to its citizens, Unfug is the

recipient of the 2020 Distinguished Alumni Award. We look forward to honoring her in person at a reception and assembly when we reconvene as a community.

In reflecting on her career, Unfug cited the work of French political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville, who asserted, "The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens." Unfug adds, "In America in general and in Colorado in particular, so much power rests with the individual. The government is us. If there's a problem, we [citizens] need to be part of the solution."

As one of those citizen problem-solvers, Unfug shares what's driven her: "I've always been a person who likes to have lots of ideas. I've been open to stepping through doors without fully knowing what's on the other side. Looking back, I realize that everything I did that felt random at the time actually made sense in the long run." For current students, she adds, "The universe points you in a direction, whether you see it or not. If you take the opportunity to step through a new door, a lot can happen." 🌟



Unfug at the White House



Unfug's 1985 Yearbook Photo