



2025 Impact Report

Supporting people with Down syndrome in achieving their dreams of higher education while spreading awareness of their capabilities and general awesomeness!!



OUR MISSION

Supporting people with Down syndrome in achieving their dreams of higher education while spreading awareness of their capabilities and general awesomeness!!

OUR VISION

A world that celebrates people with Down syndrome and supports the pursuit of higher education, employment, acceptance and inclusion for people of all abilities.

OUR CORE VALUES



Community

We believe community is one of our most powerful assets and that the best things come from pulling together.



Integrity

We believe in being truthful, decent human beings who consistently do the right thing. We honor the trust placed in our organization by our scholarship recipients, fundraisers, volunteers and donors, by handling their generous investments with care.



Inspiration

We believe showing the world what's possible brings hope and creates opportunities.



Education

We believe all people are lifelong learners and everyone deserves access to education.



Kindness

We believe everyone in the world is deserving of love, respect and compassion, and we see kindness as the key to a brighter world for all.



Inclusion

We believe every person has worth and should be valued in their community.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Liz Plachta, Executive Director,
President & Co-Founder

Tim Plachta, Co-Founder & Board Member

Tyrell McElroy, President

Sara Plachta-Elliott, Vice President

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Marc Lippincott, Board Member

Catherine Morris, Board Member

Stephanie Bomely, Board Member

Best Buddies means being seen,
celebrated, and surrounded by real friends
that love me for exactly who I am.”

—Grace Davis

Supported by @bestbuddies

National Nonprofit Day
SEPHORA



Grace Davis

2020-2023 Rockin' Recipient
Auburn University — EAGLES Program

“Ruby’s Rainbow **helped me achieve my dream of going to college.** College is expensive so they really helped me live out my dream. I love Ruby’s Rainbow so much! My favorite part of the NDSC conference in the summer is going with Ruby’s Rainbow and **giving a scholarship to another recipient.** It is so fun and I get so excited to see them so happy!”

Since 2012...



1,015

Scholarships
Awarded



\$3,776,000

In Scholarship Funds



26+

Awareness
Campaigns

In 2025...



132

Ruby's Rainbow Scholarships
granted in 2025!



\$500,000

in scholarship funds awarded!



Elizabeth Romanick

2018, 2020 Rockin' Recipient
Minot University — ASTEP program

"It has been remarkable to receive a Ruby's Rainbow scholarship, and it brought me great opportunities so I can **spread my wings and fly as an adult**. Everyone should have a **chance to fly**."



Sujay Kolli

2022-2024 Rockin' Recipient
Ferris State — Ready for Life Academy

"It was successful of getting the scholarship because **it helped me to be more confident** and learning new experiences I have with Ruby's Rainbow. Something that impacted my life was of getting the scholarship for Rub's Rainbow because it actually **helped me to be more independent** and stay productive."

Year in Review



2025 was a year full of big moments, big growth, and even bigger dreams.

Looking back on the year, I'm filled with so much gratitude for this incredible **Ruby's Rainbow community**. It was a year full of meaningful milestones and moments that reminded me why this mission means so much to our family and to so many others.

On the home front, it was a big year for our girls! Ruby started her **first year of high school** (how is that even possible?!) and became a **cheerleader**, which has been so much fun to watch. She continues to push herself in new ways, showing up with determination, confidence, and so much heart in everything she does.

We were able to take a family ski trip in December, and watching Ruby out on the mountain, slaying those turns like a boss, was one of my favorite moments of the year. This was also her fifth year with the Adaptive Sports Association, and seeing her try new things, take on challenges, and truly enjoy the journey has been such a gift.

One of the moments that made me the proudest this year was when Ruby **submitted her first job application** to be a server at Maudie's. Watching her take that step toward independence was such a special moment for our family. (And spoiler alert: we were SO excited to find out in early 2026 that she got the job!!)

Ella Mae continues to make me proud every single day. She has grown into such a kind, thoughtful, and independent young woman, someone who shows up for her family, supports her sister, and brings so much heart into everything she does. Whether she's on the basketball court, spending time with friends, or just making us laugh, she keeps life full and fun in the very best way.

And of course, Tim continues to be the steady, adventure-loving dad who keeps us all grounded and laughing. Watching him and Ruby take on new adventures together this year, especially out on the trails and the mountain, has been so special. **Our girls truly hit the jackpot in the dad department.**

One of the most meaningful moments of the year for me and Ruby was attending the **Dear Mom Conference**, where we stood side by side and read letters we had written to each other. My mama heart was absolutely bursting. I shared how one of my greatest joys has been watching Ruby grow into such a strong, capable, and determined young woman, and in that moment, she showed exactly who she is. It was emotional, beautiful, and such a powerful reminder of why this work matters so much (and yes...she even shared her tissue with me on stage 😊❤️).

While we were there, we also got to spend time with some of our amazing Rockin' Recipients, including Audrey and Jeremy, and join them for a conversation about empowering opportunities for individuals with disabilities. **Getting to see our recipients stepping into their voices, sharing their stories, and creating impact in their own communities** is something that will never stop inspiring me.

And truly, that impact continues long after graduation. One of our Rockin' Recipients, Martha, shared something this year that really stuck with me: "I want other people with disabilities to see that they don't have to be afraid or ashamed of having a difference...they just need to be themselves and let people support them."

Martha **graduated from Georgia Tech, lives independently**, works at her local YMCA creating inclusive programs for people of all abilities, and was recently appointed by the governor to serve on the Georgia Council of Developmental Disabilities. She is truly **ROCKIN' IT**—and she's just one example of what happens when dreams are supported and opportunities are available. Moments like this remind me why we do what we do.

And in true Liz fashion, I somehow fell down the rabbit hole of making sourdough this year... which turned into something even more fun when Ruby and I started our own little cooking show together! It's been equal parts chaotic and hilarious, filled with lots of laughter, music, and (sometimes questionable 😊) kitchen creations, but those are the moments I'll always treasure most.

Of course, alongside all these family moments, it was also another incredible year for Ruby's Rainbow. From the success of our 3/21 Pledge to the continued growth of our RainBOWL events, to launching our new strategic plan, it has been exciting to see this organization continue to grow and reach more individuals with Down syndrome across the country.

This year also marked an important step forward as we expanded our team, including welcoming our first full-time **Associate Director of Operations**, a role that has already made such a meaningful impact on our ability to grow and strengthen our work. (You'll hear more about that in Jessica's letter included in this report!)

But as always, the thing that stands out to me the most is the impact we were able to make together. Because of your belief, generosity, and support, **more students with Down syndrome are pursuing higher education, gaining independence, and building meaningful lives.**

I hope you know what a HUGE impact your love and generosity make. **Because of you**, big dreams are being pursued, doors are being opened, and lives are being changed in the most meaningful ways. We are beyond grateful, and we truly could not do this without you.

Here's to even more big moments, big growth, and even bigger dreams ahead!!



With SO MUCH love and gratitude,

Liz

Liz Plachta

Ruby's Rainbow Co-founder & Executive Director,
and most importantly, Mama to Ruby & Ella Mae





Walker Lindsay

2019-2021 Rockin' Recipient

University Nevada Reno — Path 2 Independence

"Ruby's Rainbow's impact for me **made me feel valued** as a scholarship recipient. I saw other high school classmates were going to college and receiving scholarships and Ruby's Rainbow made me feel **I too was important enough to receive a scholarship.**"

Jess’ First Year



A Year In — And Still Dreaming Big

When I first stepped into Ruby’s Rainbow, I remember meeting Liz and being greeted with a hug. I immediately thought, “Oh... **this place is different.**”

And over the past year, I’ve learned that what makes Ruby’s Rainbow special isn’t just what we do, it’s the **community that makes it possible.**

This year has been one of growth. We’ve strengthened our foundation through strategic planning, new systems, expanded donor outreach, and welcoming new team members into the fold. All of it working toward one shared goal: making sure we can continue saying “yes” to more students dreaming big about their futures.

But what has stayed with me most this year hasn’t been the behind-the-scenes work. It’s been the people.

I’ve had the joy of reading applications filled with hopes and dreams, and then watching those dreams begin to take shape in real life. Students stepping into their first apartments. Starting jobs and internships. Launching businesses. Building independence and confidence along the way. **We don’t just hear about their dreams; we get to watch them unfold.**

And just as powerful is what happens around them. Families, educators, and entire communities who have always believed in these students get to watch others **see what they’ve known all along.**

In a world where individuals with Down syndrome are too often told “no,” Ruby’s Rainbow gets to say something different:

**Yes, you can.
We believe in you.
Your dreams matter.**

As a parent, I know the hope we all carry for our children, that they'll have the chance to grow, to thrive, and to chase what lights them up. Being part of a community that actively **removes limits instead of placing them** has been one of the greatest privileges of my first year here.

This year has also been one of learning, from our Rockin' Recipients, from their families, and from the community cheering them on. Their journeys continue to shape how we grow and where we go next.

Looking ahead to 2026, we're building on this momentum. We're launching a **more inclusive, streamlined application process**, expanding **post-secondary resources** and exploring new programming designed to support students beyond the classroom.

Because our goal isn't just access to education, it's supporting the lives being built because of it.

One of the most beautiful parts of this work is witnessing the full circle:

From dreams shared on an application...
to dreams being lived out in the world.

And helping more people see just how capable these students truly are.



Thank you for being part of this journey, and for helping us keep saying "yes" to big dreams.

Dreaming big alongside you,

Jess Mansfield

Ruby's Rainbow Associate Director of Operations,
and proud Mama to Max



Allie Simmons

2025 Rockin' Recipient

Mississippi State University — ACCESS Program

“Ruby’s Rainbow didn’t just award a me scholarship—it **opened a door**. It reminded me that **dreams are not only possible, but worth investing in**. Through their belief and support, I’ve seen my confidence grow. Ruby’s Rainbow represents hope not just for education, but for inclusion, and a future full of possibility.”

Kyle Branscom

2025 Rockin' Recipient
University of North Carolina
Wilmington — Inclusive Futures
Program

“With help from my scholarship, I
get to go to college where I learn
**how to be a great person and a
hard worker.**”



Hazlee Gaddie

2020-2022 Rockin' Recipient
Indiana University Southeast

“Once a Rockin Recipient, you
are always a part of the Ruby's
Rainbow Family!”



Jocelyn Gaines

2025 Rockin' Recipient
Clemson University —
ClemsonLIFE

"Ruby's Rainbow **changed my life** by giving me the chance to go to college and follow my goals. **I am not defined by my disability, but by my decisions,** and Ruby's Rainbow helped make those decisions possible."



Katherine "Kit" Stephenson

2024 Rockin' Recipient
Bowling Green State University —
Clark Inclusive Scholars Program

"Ruby's Rainbow **helped me go to college just like it did my brother!** Our family will also be supporters of Ruby and Ruby's Rainbow!"



Facts & Statistics



The Power of Opportunity: Your Support Changes Lives

There are many reasons why we are so passionate about our mission here at Ruby's Rainbow, and why we believe this work is not just meaningful, but essential. **One of the most powerful** reasons is the real-life impact we see in the lives of our Rockin' Recipients.

Across the United States, adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities **still face significant barriers to employment and independent living**. While 83% of adults without disabilities ages 21—64 have full- or part-time jobs, research commissioned by Special Olympics shows that only about 34% of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities participate in the labor force. Research from The Arc of the United States also shows that **just 20% of adults with IDD live independently**, while the majority continue to rely on caregivers.

These statistics highlight just how important access to higher education can be for students with Down syndrome. Fortunately, change is happening. Today, there are more than **300 college and university programs for students with IDD across 49 states**, creating more opportunities than ever before. At Ruby's Rainbow, we've also been gathering survey data from our Rockin' Recipients to better understand the impact of these experiences, and the results give us so much hope.



In the six years that we've been collecting data from our scholarship recipients, here's what we've learned:

98%

have reported they are **glad they attended higher education** and that **their programs helped them achieve their goals.**

90%

of our **scholarship recipients who have graduated** are employed.

68%

of our Rockin' Recipients **live independently** (alone or with housemates), in college and after graduation.

83%

have reported that it would have been **difficult or impossible for them to attend their higher-education programs** without the support of their Ruby's Rainbow scholarships.

The data tells a powerful story: higher education makes a meaningful difference in helping adults with Down syndrome develop employment skills, build independence, create community connections, and pursue fulfilling lives.

And none of this would be possible without you. **Because of your support,** more students with Down syndrome are discovering what happens when big dreams are met with opportunity.



Raymond Tetschner, Parent (Michelle) Quote

2021-2022 Rockin' Recipient

University of North Florida — On Campus Transition Program

From Michelle: “Huge THANKS for Ruby’s Rainbow! Raymond and our family sought out others with his same vision of going to college. At the time, it was hard to envision what that could look like. Because of his college life-where he gained independent living skills, community navigation and had a BLAST—it **helped our family give a vision to his future**. Since college-we developed a plan where he now lives independently, walks everywhere, has a roommate, cooks and go to his jobs. He loves his life! and because of his college life and Ruby’s Rainbow-**he is LIVING HIS BEST LIFE!**”

Ashton Lagos

2023-2025 Rockin' Recipient
Millersville University —
Integrated Studies

“Ruby’s Rainbow has **made it possible for me to live my dream and go to college.**”



Quincy Bane

2020-2022 Rockin' Recipient
National Louis University —
PACE Program

“Ruby’s Rainbow helped me to have **a real college experience living on my own** in downtown Chicago. I learned how to take the subway independently, do my own grocery shopping, and use the technology that I use in my volunteer job today.”

Will Sipe

2022 Rockin' Recipient
University of North Carolina
Greensboro — Beyond Academics

“The Ruby’s Rainbow Scholarship and support from Ruby’s Rainbow **has made all the difference** in allowing me to pursue **my dreams of going to college and working toward independent living!**”



Meghan Duffy

2025 Rockin' Recipient
Millersville University —
Integrated Studies

“Ruby’s Rainbow **made it possible** for me to pursue my **hopes and dreams** to come true by living campus life!”



Fundraisers, Awareness Campaigns and Events



The 3/21 Pledge

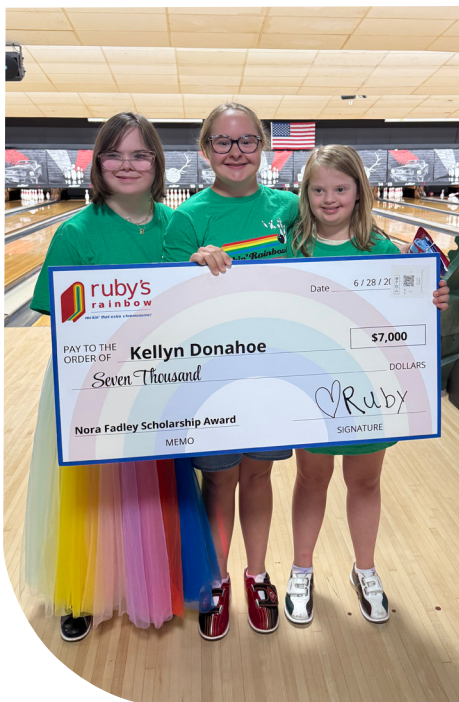
Once again, our community absolutely blew me away during the annual **3/21 Pledge**. This special campaign each March is both an awareness celebration for **World Down Syndrome Day** and **our biggest grassroots fundraiser of the year**—one that directly helps determine how many scholarships we're able to award each summer.

Our theme this year was **Big Dreams**, and it couldn't have been more fitting. At Ruby's Rainbow, we see big dreams everywhere we look—in the goals our Rockin' Recipients set for themselves, in the hopes families hold for their loved ones, and in the belief that people with Down syndrome deserve every opportunity to pursue a bright and independent future. Throughout the campaign we celebrated those dreams and invited our community to be part of making them possible.



And wow...did you ever show up! Together, during the two weeks of the 3/21 Pledge, our incredible community raised **\$600,000**. Donations poured in from **all 50 states and countries across the globe**, helping Ruby's Rainbow award **132 scholarships totaling \$500,000** to a brand-new crew of Rockin' Recipients last summer.

Thank you for believing in big dreams, and for helping make so many of them possible!!!



Ruby's Rockin' RainBOWL!

Our RainBOWL tradition kept rolling in 2025! For years, these joyful summer bowling tournaments in Austin and San Diego have brought the Ruby's Rainbow community together to celebrate and raise funds for adults rockin' that extra chromosome. This year we returned to Medina, OH for our second RainBOWL, and added an exciting new stop with our **first-ever Dallas, TX RainBOWL**. Watching the RainBOWL spirit spread to new cities has been such a dream come true, and we can't wait to **keep growing the rainbow** in the years ahead!

Down Syndrome Awareness Month

October is always one of our favorite months around here as we celebrate **Down Syndrome Awareness Month**. This year our theme was **Keep Dreaming**, a message that lives right at the heart of Ruby's Rainbow. Throughout the month we shared stories and reflections about the power of dreams and the beautiful ways they shape our lives. Ruby shared what dreaming big means to her, and we heard from members of our community and several of our Rockin' Recipients about their own goals, hopes, and plans for the future.

We also got to celebrate some pretty fun real-life moments along the way, like **Ruby's first homecoming**, complete with the legendary (and very sparkly!) Texas mum. Moments like these remind us that awareness isn't just about statistics or information, it's about **celebrating real lives, real experiences, and the many dreams still ahead**.

Throughout the month we shared stories, laughs, and meaningful conversations that helped shine a light on the lives, interests, and possibilities of people with Down syndrome, and reminded us all why we should always **keep dreaming**.





Alyssa Biggs

2023-2025 Rockin' Recipient
Clemson University — ClemsonLIFE

"Ruby's Rainbow scholarship **makes me happy**. I wear my shirt proudly and am happy when I see other friends wearing theirs."

Chloe Buck

2024-2025 Rockin' Recipient
Hope University — Ready For Life
Academy

“Ruby’s support **provided an opportunity for me that others overlooked.**”



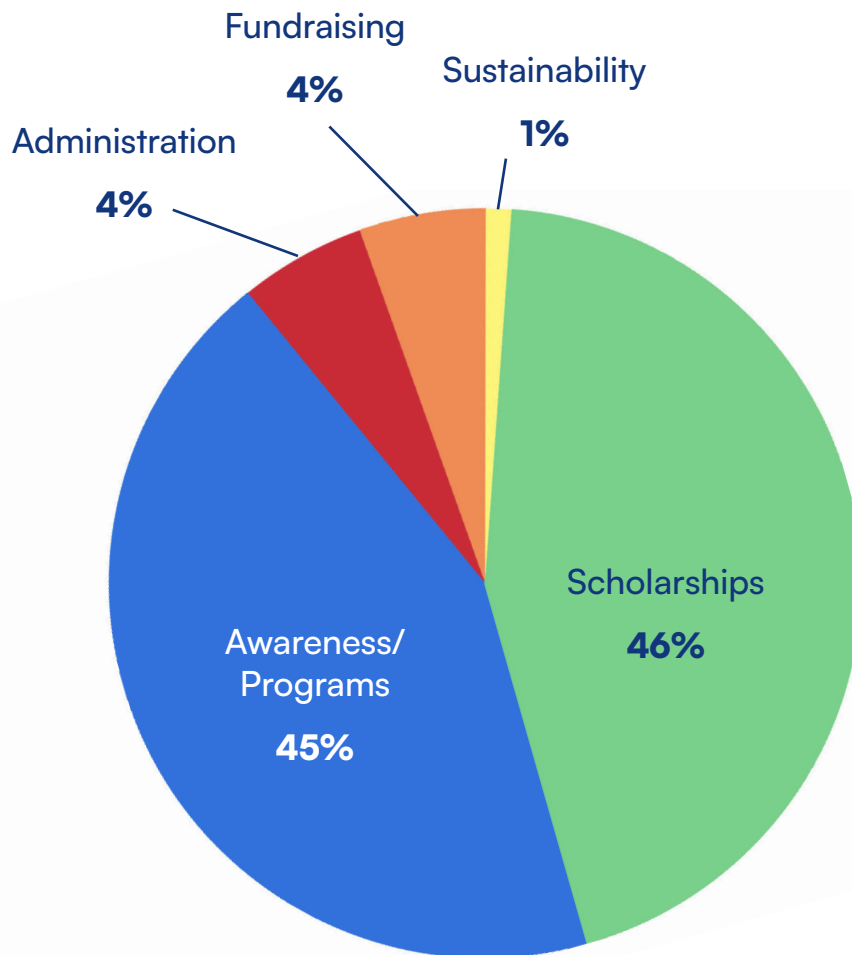
Caleb Cooper

2022-2025 Rockin' Recipient
John Brown University —
Ability Tree Connections

“Ruby’s Rainbow Scholarship is a **blessing!** Provided a **road of success** for me... a **Hope.**”



Financials & Strategic Plan



● Scholarships \$470,250 (46%)

● Awareness/Programs \$460,250 (45%)

● Administration \$57,609 (4%)

● Fundraising \$57,609 (4%)

● Sustainability \$11,650 (1%)

Guided by Our Strategic Plan

Our current three-year strategic plan helps focus our work and ensures Ruby's Rainbow continues growing in ways that support our mission and community.

Our Strategic Focus for 2025—2027

Awareness & Outreach

Expanding awareness of the capabilities and potential of adults with Down syndrome while growing the Ruby's Rainbow community nationwide.

Scholarship Impact

Strengthening our scholarship program and increasing opportunities for adults with Down syndrome to pursue post-secondary education and meaningful independence.

Growth & Sustainability

Building long-term financial stability through strategic fundraising, partnerships, and donor engagement.

Infrastructure & Data Strategy

Investing in the systems, tools, and processes that help Ruby's Rainbow operate efficiently and scale our impact.

We are always proud to share how your generosity supports the mission of Ruby's Rainbow. The chart above shows how funds were allocated in 2025, reflecting our commitment to investing in the programs, awareness efforts, and operational support that make our work possible. Thanks to our incredible community, **the majority of our resources continue to go directly toward scholarships** and the programs that support adults with Down syndrome in pursuing their dreams of higher education and independence.

2025 also marked the beginning of **our newest three-year strategic plan**, a roadmap designed to guide Ruby's Rainbow through our next season of growth and impact. This plan was developed with thoughtful input from board members, staff, and dedicated supporters who share a deep belief in our mission. Together, we identified key priorities focused on expanding awareness, strengthening our scholarship program, increasing sustainability, and continuing to build the infrastructure needed to support our growing community.

Seeing this plan come to life has been incredibly exciting. As Ruby's Rainbow continues to grow, this strategic roadmap helps ensure we remain focused on what matters most—**creating opportunities, supporting big dreams, and building a future** where adults with Down syndrome are celebrated for their abilities and contributions.

When we look back at where this organization began over a decade ago, it's amazing to see how far we've come, and we can't wait to see what the next few years will bring!

In Loving Memory of Eddie Sitzman

August 2, 2003 — July 15, 2025

*“Stand up for yourself and don’t be afraid to go out there
and be yourself...because you are not alone in this.”*

— **Eddie Sitzman**

Edward “Eddie” Sitzman was awarded a Ruby’s Rainbow scholarship and was preparing to begin his freshman year in the Judson University RISE Program, where he planned to study Child Development and pursue his dream of becoming a teacher’s assistant.

Eddie was a fierce competitor, dedicated athlete, passionate advocate for inclusion, and a natural leader in his community. Whether earning medals through Special Olympics, volunteering in classrooms and throughout his community, or encouraging others with his positivity and determination, Eddie made a lasting impact on everyone who knew him.

He believed deeply that every person deserves the opportunity and support to become the best version of themselves, and he lived that belief every day.

Although Eddie passed away before beginning his college journey, his dreams, spirit, and legacy continue to inspire us. We are forever grateful for the joy, leadership, and light he brought to our community and to everyone who had the privilege of knowing him.

Forever a cherished part of the Ruby’s Rainbow family. 🌈





Looking Ahead

I hope you know what a HUGE impact your love and generosity make on the lives of our Rockin' Recipients. Because of you, big dreams are being pursued, doors are being opened, and lives are being changed in the most meaningful ways. We are beyond grateful, and we truly could not do this without you! Here's to even more big moments, big growth, and even bigger dreams ahead!!

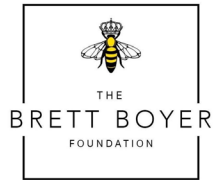
With SO MUCH love and gratitude,
Liz, Tim, Ella Mae, Ruby and the RR Crew!



rubysrainbow.org | 866-766-RUBY (7829)

 @RubysRainbow  @rubysrainbow

We Love and Appreciate Our Sponsors



2025 Sponsor Spotlight!



McLane

Ruby's Rainbow is proud to feature McLane as our Rockstar Sponsor for 2025!

McLane is a leading supply chain services company in the United States, specializing in grocery and foodservice distribution. It's a wholly owned subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway. McLane serves convenience stores, mass merchants, drug stores, and chain restaurants, distributing over 50,000 different consumer products. The company operates over 80 distribution centers and employs more than 20,000 teammates.

Ruby's Rainbow is so grateful to the wonderful folks at McLane for their partnership and their incredibly generous support!

Visit McLane on the Web at [McLaneCo.com](https://www.mclaneco.com)

