



Ruby + Associates staff donates school supplies to the Judson Center to support children in the center's foster care and adoption programs.

THE GREATEST



Ruby + Associates, a firm with 50 employees, has donated over \$625,000 to local and national charities with a special focus on STEM opportunities for underrepresented groups.

Ruby + Associates encourages employees to identify charitable causes they're passionate about.

BY MICHELE MEYER

GIFT

Tricia Ruby tears up when describing year-end gifts from workers at her firm, who pick a new charity annually and donate on her behalf.

“They choose really thoughtfully,” says Ruby, president and CEO of Ruby + Associates, based in Bingham Farms, Michigan, in the suburbs of Detroit.

Last year, the staff of 50 raised \$4,595 for the Oxford Community Memorial and Victims Fund, benefiting families of the four students who died last November in the shooting at Oxford High School in Oxford, Michigan.

Community service has been a major focus at Ruby + Associates in the two decades since she joined the structural engineering firm founded by her father, Dave Ruby, in 1984.

Also with a branch in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Ruby + Associates specializes in structural engineering for the construction, architecture, and steelmaking industries. It has worked on high-profile projects such as a 480,000-square-foot automotive supplier plant in downtown Detroit, the national headquarters of insurer Zurich North America in Chicago, and a new roof on Syracuse University’s Carrier Dome.

As Ruby + Associates’ CFO and COO, Ruby helped form a community service committee in 2008. Then, taking the reins as

President and CEO in 2011, she committed 1 percent of annual revenue to charitable groups, especially those that aid the underserved and marginalized.

Since then, the company’s generosity has topped \$625,000. “Giving is at the core of who I am,” says Ruby, whom ACEC recognized with a 2019 National Community Service Award. “You get back so much more than you give. It replenishes your soul.”

‘GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT’

To encourage employees to give their time more readily, Ruby + Associates grants eight hours of paid volunteer time yearly.

“I don’t want to be the only one who feels delight in giving back,” Ruby says. “As company leader, I want to encourage others to experience that joy—not out of obligation, but out of generosity of spirit.”

Ruby searches for one trait in particular in new hires: empathy. “Empathy is essential to being a great teammate, and construction is a team sport,” she says. “Generosity to others is a wonderful byproduct.”

She encourages employees to bring their ideas to her. “Tricia has never turned down any idea we’ve had,” says Hollie



Each year Ruby + Associates sends volunteers to clear blight in a Detroit neighborhood for Life Remodeled, a local nonprofit.



Employees volunteer with Gleaners, a local food bank, to help set up and run a mobile food pantry for seniors.

Wall, project engineer and leader of the community service committee. “Instead, she asks, ‘What else can we do?’”

A back-to-school drive for foster kids is dear to Wall, mother of a 2-year-old and a newborn. “I can’t imagine sending my children to school without the supplies they need to succeed,” she says.

A personal mission for committee member and Project Engineer Evan Fredline is the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. His brother has Type I diabetes. “If he forgets or takes the wrong amount of insulin, it could put him in the hospital,” Fredline says.

Another committee member cares deeply about hunger, having experienced it. “His family immigrated with nothing,” Ruby says. “You don’t learn calculus if you didn’t eat breakfast before class. Giving to food causes is so meaningful to him.”

Among Ruby’s passions is the Judson Center, a nonprofit that helps 12,000 families coping with abuse, neglect, autism spectrum disorder, or developmental disabilities. She says her two-year term as board chairperson was the biggest privilege of her life.

“My best friend has two boys with autism,” Ruby says. “I’ve watched her raise them to be wonderful adults, but it was a major struggle without services such as those at Judson Center.”

Ruby also wants to help change her field’s demographics, and



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PRESIDENT AND CEO
RUBY + ASSOCIATES



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she acknowledges the industry is predominately white. Ruby is a founding supporter of the NCSEA Foundation Diversity in Structural Engineering Scholarship, and she serves on the group’s committee charged with funding those scholarships. Ruby’s engineers mentor high school students in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) through the Southeast Michigan ACE Mentor program.

PANDEMIC PIVOTS

While the pandemic has pushed much of Ruby + Associates’ work online, it hasn’t stopped the company from pursuing charitable goals.

“Instead of putting our philanthropy on hold, we’ve kept our foot on the gas,” Fredline says.

That has often meant tailoring activities to handle the constraints of remote meetings.

Virtual coordination ramped up for a back-to-school drive to help the Judson Center, for example. “Staffers jumped on Microsoft Teams to share online deals they found for lunchboxes, headphones, and other school supplies,” Fredline says. The company also contributed backpacks and Texas Instruments engineering calculators for 30 students.

Everything was shipped to Fredline’s house, resulting in boxes piled high in his kitchen and dining room. Committee members masked up, went to the house, and took it all to the center.

For the Judson Center's Holiday Gift Program, staff at Ruby + Associates purchase holiday gifts for families in need.



The company's generosity has topped **\$625,000**

The annual Halloween costume competition also moved online, and the company gave \$25 on behalf of each contestant to Forgotten Harvest, a Detroit food bank.

When Gleaners Community Food Bank's rules limited in-person volunteering last Thanksgiving, workers raised \$5,000 and timed the delivery of their donation for a date when Kroger and Ford Motor Co. planned to match donations. Since Ruby + Associates did the same, the \$4,575 quadrupled to \$18,300.

"It wasn't as personal as being there in person, but it might have had a much larger impact," Fredline says.

Other activities have also adapted within current limits, such as Life Remodeled, a yearly project where volunteers clear blight in urban Detroit neighborhoods. "It's fun to break a sweat and do some good," Fredline says. "Neighbors drop by and thank us, which is so heartwarming."

Wall says volunteering brings her gratitude. "We're very aware of how lucky we are, especially in these hard times," Wall says. "In the city and the suburbs, people may struggle to feed their children."



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HOLLIE WALL
PROJECT ENGINEER
RUBY + ASSOCIATES

3 SECRETS TO ENCOURAGING EMPLOYEE GIVING

Two-thirds of Ruby + Associates staff contribute to the firm's community service, a figure Tricia Ruby credits to three approaches:

1. BE HANDS-OFF.

"Community service committees can't be successful if they're dictated," Ruby says. "You need to set a vision and step away, then watch and support as it takes on a life of its own."

2. SAY YES.

Contribute to the charities that matter to your employees and allow them to volunteer with organizations of their choice. "I'm open to any form of their philanthropy because it comes from their hearts," Ruby says.

3. HIRE EMPATHETIC PEOPLE.

Ruby says empathy is key to a cohesive team, and her staff agrees. "People at Ruby + Associates are so generous, and we never have to push," says Evan Fredline, project engineer. "They jump in. That's our people—good people."

A GOOD PROBLEM

Ruby + Associates has had an unusual problem the past two years: Greater financial success meant it wasn't always so easy to meet its 1 percent annual revenue goal for giving.

When Ruby learned the company still had another \$20,000 in its 2020 philanthropic budget to distribute, she announced that the firm would match employee giving to the causes they cared about. The result was that workers gave \$20,000 to 41 charities—and the company matched their gifts. Last year, Ruby matched the donated total again for 39 nonprofits that staff especially valued.

"I loved getting lists of their chosen charities," she says. "I loved getting insights into our people's hearts. It's the greatest gift ever." ■

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