

COLUMN: NATHAN BOMEY

Top 10 Ann Arbor companies Barack Obama should visit in May

Posted: 7:38 p.m. February 11, 2010

37 Comments. [Comment Now](#)

When U.S. President **Barack Obama** visited southeast Michigan in summer 2009 at the nadir of the global auto crisis, economic development organization **Ann Arbor SPARK** invited Obama to tour promising companies in the Ann Arbor region.

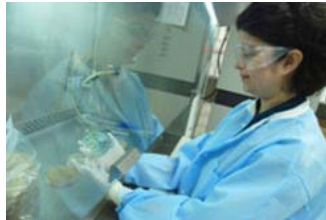
Obama didn't take SPARK up on the offer. But SPARK is poised to make the offer again now that he's slated to [deliver the commencement address May 1 at the University of Michigan](#), said **Elizabeth Parkinson**, vice president of marketing and public relations for SPARK.

"We absolutely will" extend the invitation, she said.

Here's my list of the **Top 10 Ann Arbor companies Obama should visit** -- and why they're relevant to his administration.

1. **Accio Energy**. The Ann Arbor-based firm is developing a potentially revolutionary wind energy device that would generate electricity [without moving parts](#). Obama's administration is emphasizing the importance of reducing carbon emissions and investing in alternative energy.

2. **NanoBio Corp.** The Ann Arbor-based U-M startup is developing nanotechnology-based flu vaccine technology that aims to [improve vaccine manufacturing processes](#). During the height of the swine flu epidemic in late 2009, U.S. vaccine manufacturers were [struggling to deliver](#) enough vaccines due to antiquated manufacturing processes. Health care experts say improved vaccine manufacturing processes may be critical to avoid future pandemics.



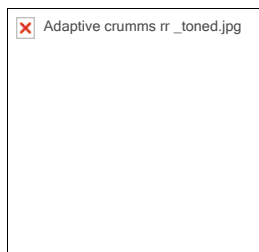
NanoBio researchers are developing new flu vaccine technology.

3. **A123Systems**. The vehicle battery firm, which established an Ann Arbor research operation when it acquired U-M startup **T/J Technologies** in 2006, is adding more than **5,000 jobs** in various expansion projects throughout Michigan. The Obama administration announced in August it would [provide a \\$249.1 million grant](#) for A123Systems - financing from the \$787 billion economic stimulus package. Alternative powertrain technology based on lithium-ion batteries is important to helping automakers meet [aggressive Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards](#) implemented by Obama last year.

4. **Arboretum Ventures**. Getting capital to startup tech companies is critical to the nation's economic revival. Ann Arbor-based **Arboretum**, which last year raised **\$73 million** in fresh capital to invest in promising companies, is arguably the most influential venture capital firm in the Midwest. And the companies Arboretum has invested in -- firms like **HandyLab** (see No. 7) and Ann Arbor-based **HealthMedia** -- [are adding jobs](#).

5. **Toyota Technical Center**. Obama today told Bloomberg he was [unsure](#) whether the Japanese automaker had responded appropriately to its recall crisis. The **1,100 American engineers** at the technical center in York Township had [nothing to do with the recall](#) - but their engineering expertise is reflective of one of Michigan's core assets - talented engineers.

6. **Adaptive Materials**. The Pittsfield Township-based fuel cell firm, which recently signed a **\$3 million contract** to



supply its devices to the **U.S. Air Force**, is developing innovative portable power technology based on commercially available propane fuel. It's particularly useful technology **for the military** - which needs to become more energy-efficient.

Adaptive Materials co-founder Michelle Crumm, who introduced then-candidate Barack Obama to a political rally in Lansing in 2008.

7. **HandyLab**. The Pittsfield Township-based U-M startup firm, acquired by New Jersey-based global giant **Becton, Dickinson and Co.** for **\$275 million** in November, has developed a medical device that promises to lower health care costs by making it **easier and quicker** for doctors to detect infections in patients. Investing in medical technology is one of the few remaining bipartisan issues in the health care debate.

8. **Menlo Innovations**. The Ann Arbor-based software firm, which has enjoyed revenue growth for several straight years, has earned national plaudits for cultivating an **innovative workspace**. Establishing innovative workplace environments is critical to maintaining America's role as the world's entrepreneurial leader.

9. **Systems In Motion**. The California-based information technology services startup in 2009 established an operation in Pittsfield Township, where it said it would hire **more than 1,100 workers**. Systems In Motion calls its plan "in-sourcing," because it's hiring workers in America to handle services that were often outsourced to India several years ago.



Menlo Innovations CEO Rich Sheridan regularly gives tours of his innovative workspace in Ann Arbor. Perhaps Obama would like one.

10. **Zingerman's**. The staple of Ann Arbor's fine-dining scene has **morphed into a symbol** of Ann Arbor's entrepreneurial attitude. The firm now employs about **500 workers** - and serves as an example that entrepreneurialism can flourish in Michigan's downtrodden economy.

Contact *AnnArbor.com's* Nathan Bomey at (734) 623-2587 or nathanbomey@annarbor.com. You can also [follow him on Twitter](#).