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Silicon Valley pioneer sites its new headquarters in Ann Arbor

Q&A with Rick Wallace, President and CEO, KLA Corporation

Crain's Content Studio



Rendering of KLA's new headquarters in Ann Arbor, set to open in 2021.

KLA Corporation

Silicon Valley pioneer KLA Corporation broke ground in 1976 with its innovative mask inspection tool for semiconductor process control. Last year, KLA broke ground again, but this time on a second U.S. headquarters, to be located in Ann Arbor.

The new 220,000 square-foot site is set to open in 2021 and will be home to a variety of corporate functions, hardware and software development and KLA's artificial intelligence (AI) research and development (R&D) team. The team is recruiting now for their temporary facility to meet the goal of 600 people at the new campus in the first 5 years.

Crain's Content Studio recently asked KLA's Rick Wallace about the company and its decision to headquarter in Ann Arbor. Wallace joined KLA in 1988 as an applications engineer and held numerous positions with the company before assuming the role of president and CEO in 2006.

KLA Corporation CEO Rick Wallace addresses the crowd during the groundbreaking celebration at the site of the company's new Ann Arbor headquarters.

Can you tell us a bit about KLA and its history?

KLA is a global technology company. We have 10,400 employees in 19 locations and generate \$5 billion in annual revenue. Our focus is developing and manufacturing process-control and process-enabling solutions to accelerate tomorrow's electronic devices. Our core business is semiconductor measurement and inspection—essentially, ensuring chips are high performing, safe and reliable for operation of technological devices.

We may not be a household name, but we are proud to be part of the most significant technological breakthroughs. Virtually no laptop, smartphone, wearable device, voice-controlled gadget, flexible screen, VR device or smart car would have made it into your hands without us.

Talk about the decision to bring KLA to Ann Arbor.

We considered many possible sites in the U.S., but ultimately, Ann Arbor's proximity to high-caliber engineering talent combined with exceptional quality of life, prime location and reasonable cost of living drew us to this location. Personally, I was pleased with the selection as a University of Michigan alumnus.

Semiconductors are at the core of innovation in all industries – from healthcare to consumer electronics, with automotive being a particularly innovative space, especially given the rise of advanced driver-assistance systems (ADAS) and promise of autonomous vehicles. KLA is at the forefront of advancing capabilities, increasing reliability, and eliminating defects in chips, all of which improves automotive electronics and advances autonomous vehicles. Michigan leads the nation in connected and automated vehicle testing projects and legislation. For us, being close to the automotive original equipment manufacturers is an advantage.

Last August KLA became the first semiconductor company to join the Automotive Electronics Council, and we're working with the Council to set qualification standards for electronics components in cars.

This location also allows the company to strengthen our long-term partnership with the University of Michigan, including engaging in collaborative research. In 2018 we established a \$3 million endowment for graduate fellowships at the College of Engineering.

KLA Corporation

Aerial view rendering of KLA Corporation's new Ann Arbor headquarters and its natural, wooded surroundings.

What kinds of projects will KLA's Ann Arbor team be working on?

We're excited about our AI R&D team of experts who are developing machine learning and deep learning applications to extract intelligence from semiconductor manufacturing data sets. This innovative analysis will enable smarter decisions throughout manufacturing and the resulting boost in efficiency will help make development in electronics quicker, with more reliable and cost effective semiconductor chips.

What can you share about your new facility?

We decided on a characteristically Michigan design for our new campus—leading-edge innovation in the midst of natural beauty. The ultra-modern facility is being built into the surrounding 18 acres of natural woodland, just east of Ann Arbor. The six-story office space will have a clean room for hardware R&D and prototype development.

To minimize impact on the environment, we are building the parking garage underground and will maintain the wooded surroundings with walking paths throughout campus so employees can get out and connect with nature during the workday. We'll also have a full-service fitness center, coffee shop and cafeteria on site.

What kinds of candidates are you recruiting?

We're recruiting engineers, physicists, data scientists and other problem-solvers throughout the Midwest. We're looking for candidates who are intellectually curious and eager to explore new frontiers in electron and photon optics, sensors, machine learning and data analytics. The new campus will be another innovation hub and growth center for developing our next generation of products.

What would you recommend to someone who is interested in learning more about KLA and opportunities in Ann Arbor?

While we might be a new kid on the block in Ann Arbor, KLA has long since earned its reputation for innovative leadership in technology. Anyone looking for intellectual challenges and the chance to play a part in the most significant technology breakthroughs should visit www.kla.com/michigan to learn more about KLA Corporation in Ann Arbor and careers.kla.com for more information on open positions and the culture and benefits we have to offer. We tell our employees to think big and drive progress—but most importantly to enjoy the journey.

Inline Play

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