



Crest of a wave: Eco Atlantic Oil & Gas chief executive Gil Holzman (left) and (far left) surfing off the Maldives  
Photos: ECO ATLANTIC

# Holzman riding high at Eco

**Eco Atlantic Oil & Gas** founder and chief executive takes to the waves as **Toronto-listed player** expands its portfolio

**BARRY MORGAN**

Paris

**E**co Atlantic Oil & Gas founder and chief executive Gil Holzman fell in love with the industry — and the African continent — more than a decade ago while managing a portfolio of oil and mining interests including gold and cobalt for “one of Israel’s most successful entrepreneurs”.

“It piqued my interest, really spurred me to learn all I could about the extractive industries trade,” he says.

“After two and half years, I set out on my own to look for gold in Guinea, copper and uranium in southwest Africa,” and soon identified oil prospects in Namibia as the likeliest target.

In 2011, Holzman incorporated Eco Oil & Gas as a private entity in the British Virgin Islands, later that year merging it with Goldbard Resources.

Goldbard Resources’ parent company Goldbard Capital then changed its name to Eco Atlantic Oil & Gas before readmission to the Toronto stock exchange.

Eco emerged as the largest acreage holder in Namibia after state oil company Namcor, sitting on five petroleum licences — two off-

shore in the Walvis basin and two onshore, including coalbed methane prospects — and its portfolio soon expanded to Ghana and across the tectonic divide to Guyana.

Holzman was born in 1972, raised and educated in the Israeli port city of Haifa after which he left for three years military service, which he says was not time wasted.

“The Israeli military is never boring. You get educated and learn about the region, who are your friends, your enemies and your potential enemies,” he says.

From a base in eastern Israel, he watched as Scud missiles flew overhead towards Tel Aviv at the height of the First Gulf War.

#### Prestigious

Business studies and a law degree followed at the prestigious Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya (IDC), north of Tel Aviv, which hosts the Arison School of Business from where he also graduated in 2002 with an MBA after a semester in the US at Wharton School’s West Coast faculty in San Francisco.

However, this was no quiet period devoted to leisure and aca-

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Eco Atlantic Oil & Gas founder and chief executive Gil Holzman

demetic pursuits. Holzman’s varsity experience coincided with an intense four-years as a top aide to politicians, starting in 1999 with Israel’s then-prime minister Ehud Barak, whom he served as campaign manager alongside US consultant Democracy Corps run by legendary strategists Stan Greenberg and James Carville.

That led directly to a spell on Al Gore’s campaign trail, and another in support of Amani Karume’s presidential candidature for the Republic of Zanzibar in 2000, “and he won in a landslide,” says Holzman.

He became Greenberg and Carville’s man on the ground in foreign forays as far afield as Bulgaria, with Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer and mayor of Bucharest Traian Basescu, later to

become president of Romania, numbering among his clients.

In 2003, a timely approach from Quebec-based industrial combine Bombardier allowed him to spread his wings into commerce, heading up the Israeli office and directing sales for the Middle East, flogging trains and promoting private jets in Egypt and Jordan.

It was not long before he got noticed and moved to Berlin as director of global business development.

Bilingual in English and Hebrew, he reads German and has dual Israeli-German nationality as his grandfather emigrated to Israel in 1936 before the holocaust. His French and Arabic approach fluency. “In Haifa we lived within Arab communities — it’s a wonderfully rich and accurate

tongue,” he says. Holzman quit Bombardier in 2006 to join Dan Gertler’s DGI International for that two-year exposure to Africa fated to fix his future direction.

Outside business, his family helps him remain focused and on an even keel. “I compensated for my lack of humanities education by marrying a History of Art graduate, my father-in-law manages the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and we follow them all over the world as a family — it’s one of my greatest joys,” he says.

#### Seeking calm

Aside from his three children, Holzman’s other inspiration is surfing. He owns seven boards and in March visits Madiha to seek calm, a “secret place on the southernmost tip of Sri Lanka where the waves break on a shallow reef”.

He loves to surf in beautiful locations, recharging the spirit without access to phones or computers, “where it’s just me, the ocean and the energy, because waves are pure energy — they can be tracked for thousands of miles before breaking on your shore”, he says. U