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## **Q&A with Emily Hazelwood and Amber Jackson, Co-Founders of Blue Latitudes LLC implementing Rigs-to-Reefs Programs and Repurposing Offshore Gas Platforms into Artificial Reefs creating environmentally Safe and beautiful Marine Ecosystems**

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**Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine**

**CEOCFO: *Ms. Jackson, what was the vision when you founded Blue Latitudes and where are you today?***

**Ms. Jackson:** Blue Latitudes was founded on the vision to seek silver linings in our oceans, areas where industry and environment coexist and instead of their being an oil spill or something negative impacting the environment, we are looking for areas where the ocean has rebounded and potentially could lead to a very positive thing for our environment. Here, one of our major examples and a cornerstone of much of our work is looking at the Rigs-to-Reefs (R2R) program, and that is where we repurpose offshore gas platforms into artificial reefs. That is sort of the shining star and example of this greater idea of finding silver linings in our oceans at the intersections of industry and environment.

**CEOCFO: *How did you decide? Did you wake up with an epiphany one day?***

**Mrs. Hazelwood:** The idea came to us in graduate school. Before I had attended graduate school, I worked as a field tech on the BP oil spill, gathering different biological samples to better understand the full impact of the spill. During that time, the fishermen that had been hired to drive our boats would always talk about how incredible the fishing was on the offshore platforms. At the time it seemed a bit strange because we were sampling and trying to understand the impact of an oil spill resulting from one of those offshore platforms, and they were saying those platforms had some of the best fishing in the Gulf of Mexico. When I went to graduate school, I had an idea of what I wanted to study; why were these oil platforms successful habitats for fish and other marine life. In graduate school I met Amber and we decided to pursue our Master's thesis together on the feasibility of implementing a Rigs-to-Reefs program in California. From there, we united both of our skills, Amber's being a background in marine technology and communications, and mine being a background in environmental consulting, to create our own marine environmental consulting firm that was really formulated and based around the Rigs-to-Reefs program.

**CEOCFO: *Are people that should know about Blue Latitudes, aware of what you do?***

**Ms. Jackson:** Yes, I would say that our clients are aware of the work that we do primarily because of the outreach that we conduct not only here in our home base of California, but around the world from Norway to Germany to Scotland. We attend multiple conferences a year, including Decom World, which is the largest offshore decommissioning conference, and it is held in Houston, Texas every year. We often lead panel sessions or give presentations on this idea of repurposing offshore oil and gas platforms by reefs.

**CEOCFO: *Would you walk us through some of the details for one or two projects?***

**Ms. Jackson:** Not every offshore oil and gas platform is a good candidate to be reefed. That is where we come in, to look at each offshore oil and gas platform on a case by case basis to determine if there is significant ecological value and the options that are available to convert the structure into a permanent reef. A typical day for us might involve reviewing remotely operated vehicle or ROV footage taken on some of these platforms. Emily and I are certified scuba divers, however we are limited by depth; we can only go down to recreational limits of about 110 ft., whereas a ROV can go all

the way down to 7000 ft. if not deeper. Some oil and gas infrastructure can be found in significant water depths, so we use ROV footage to look at the marine life and conduct a variety of analyses to determine the ecological value of that subsea infrastructure.

**CEOFCO: *What might you look at that less knowledgeable people might not recognize?***

**Mrs. Hazelwood:** I think so much of our work is just that, when you look at an offshore oil platform from the shoreline, it does not look like a coral reef and most people would not believe that those platforms could also be healthy functioning ecosystems that are abundant with marine life. Most people look at an oil platform and view it as a blight on the horizon, or they think environmental catastrophe, oil spill, so a big part of what we do is gathering research and data that communicates the value of these offshore oil platforms and then sharing that data with the general public. Seeing is believing so when the public sees the photographs and video and read our papers and our stories, they really start to understand that these are not just oil platforms, they are artificial reefs. The same concept can be applied to lots of other different types of offshore energy industries like wind farms. Wind farms are similar to offshore oil and gas platforms in structure, although the energy they produce is different. You can expect that they would start to attract and eventually produce the same kind of marine life.

**“There are offshore oil and gas platforms in almost every ocean around the world, and at some point, every one of these structures will reach the end of their productive lives. When that time comes, government and industry alike will be forced to evaluate what decommissioning options are available that are environmentally sensitive, safe and fiscally responsible, and that’s where Blue Latitudes comes in.”- Emily Hazelwood Co-Founder**

**CEOFCO: *Is interest growing about Blue Latitudes and about the environment?***

**Mrs. Hazelwood:** People are becoming much more interested in figuring out ways to not just preserve areas of our oceans that are pristine and perfect, because those areas are becoming few and far between. They are starting to want to save areas of their ocean that are in their own backyard. You do not have to travel to exotic places to be able to experience a beautiful marine ecosystem. I think people are becoming much more interested in what can be done to preserve the marine life in their own backyard. People are very much wanting to feel like there is a positive light being cast on the environment, instead of the doom and gloom we are used to seeing these days. I think seeking out and highlighting unique areas of our oceans that are overlooked because they are too deep, too industrialized or too remote, is a great way to get people to be enthusiastic about figuring out ways to protect and learn more about our oceans, and ultimately is a great opportunity to protect greater swaths of our blue planet. The same can be said about oil companies, they are keenly aware of the impact their work has on the environment and I think they are very interested to learn what sort of marine life is growing on their offshore structures and how it can contribute to a healthier ocean environment.

**CEOFCO: *What is the business model for Blue Latitudes?***

**Ms. Jackson:** Blue Latitudes is a certified, women-owned small business, marine environmental consulting firm, conducting research, ROV assessment, ecological value assessments, biological monitoring, permitting and environmental impact assessments for offshore infrastructure. However, a big part of our mission involves education, outreach and exploration, so we are in the process of forming a non-profit organization as well, the Blue Latitudes Foundation. This is an exciting new adventure for us because it will broaden the horizons of the types of projects we are able to work on.

**CEOFCO: *How do you supervise a project across the world, or is it that once you let people know what needs to be done, they can go ahead and take the next steps?***

**Mrs. Hazelwood:** I think it depends on the project. Some projects you absolutely need to be in-country to supervise the work that is being done, but in many cases we are able to collaborate with a lot of the local scientists and universities who have already gathered a lot of the data and have a better understanding of what the ecosystems look like in that area. That really enables us to manage the project remotely and not spend as much time flying around to each of our different projects. Much of our project work is international and in the Gulf of Mexico, so utilizing and working with universities and independent researchers, is an excellent resource for us.

**CEOFCO: *What surprised you as Blue Latitudes has grown and evolved?***

**Ms. Jackson:** What surprised us is the reception of this idea by the energy industry. I think we were concerned that perhaps oil and gas and other entities would not be interested in this kind of decommissioning alternative because they have other objectives. However, we have found our work with the energy industry to be quite successful. The industry is very receptive to this idea or Rigs to Reefs not only because they can save money through reefing their structures but

also because they have a strong interest in the environment and are very interested in the different images and video that we show them of the marine life on their structures. A lot of this goes back to their interaction with these platforms, not only for oil and gas production, but also as recreational fishing hot spots. Many members of the oil and gas industry go offshore on their weekends to fish off these platforms and really utilize the resources that are growing on them. It has been a fun and surprising aspect of working with oil and gas.

**CEO CFO: *What is next for Blue Latitudes?***

**Mrs. Hazelwood:** I think one area that we are seeking to move into is we want to start to explore other offshore industries, like offshore wind, and how we might be able to work with those industries. Many areas, like the east coast of the United States, don't have offshore oil platforms, but they do have windfarms, and we can see many applications for our work in those areas. Additionally, we want to continue to expand the foot print of our work in the international community. There are offshore oil and gas platforms in almost every ocean around the world, and at some point, every one of these structures will reach the end of their productive lives. When that time comes, government and industry alike will be forced to evaluate what decommissioning options are available that are environmentally sensitive, safe and fiscally responsible, and that's where Blue Latitudes comes in. We have worked off the coast of West Africa, Thailand, and Malaysia, and we are keenly interested in continuing to expand our international project portfolio.

**CEO CFO: *Do you see the need for additional personnel as you grow?***

**Ms. Jackson:** Hiring the right people can make or break a great company. We have been fortunate to work with some great volunteers and interns along the way that have helped us to understand what types of qualities we are looking for in people. We anticipate that our company will continue to grow and in the future we will be hiring additional personnel to help handle the increases in work load. For the time being, we are small team of four, including an affiliate scientist we work with out of Louisiana State University.

**CEO CFO: *Why is Blue Latitudes an important company and an important idea?***

**Mrs. Hazelwood:** I think that Blue Latitudes is an important company because we challenge a lot of the stereotypical molds that are associated either with marine scientists, environmentalists or with the offshore energy industry. I do not think we fit strictly into any of these molds, and historically, these groups do not get along. Marine scientists do not often shake hands with oil and gas companies and that has been a challenging stereotype for us to break. As a company, Blue Latitude firmly believes that industry and environmentalists and community groups alike, really need to work together in order to address some of the most critical environmental challenges of our time and see continued success in our project work, enabling the Rigs-to-Reefs program to continue to expand. This is a challenge for Amber and I. Every single day we encounter different obstacles that would preclude a Rigs-to-Reefs program from being implemented or preclude people from understanding the value of offshore platform reefs, but it is a fun challenge for us and we enjoy working on it.

**Ms. Jackson:** One additional thing I would add is we started this company to address a problem that we saw and that problem was that there are thousands of offshore-owned gas platforms around the world that will all need to be decommissioned at a certain point. Decommissioning is an expensive and environmentally impactful process, especially when you consider the marine life thriving below the surface. We started this company to address that problem of decommissioning and find solutions that could potentially repurpose these structures as reefs and create a win for the environment and industry alike.