

## Cleanup firms find a Moses



Zofnass gave up fast-paced investment banking, but he still runs with friends like Bill Clinton (left).

To a growing number of environmental consulting firms, Paul J. Zofnass is the new Moses—leading them through treacherous financial waters and around Wall Street sharks to the promised land of profitability. The former investment banker has combined business savvy, Blue Chip connections and an unusually down-to-earth style to carve a uniquely successful financial consulting practice for engineers.

In just over two years, Zofnass's New York City-based Environmental Financial Consulting Group has won more than 30 industry clients, with retainer contracts from such cleanup giants as Woodward Clyde Group Inc., The ERM Group and Montgomery Watson. Executives seek his counsel on everything from cash flow and recapitalization to acquisitions and public offerings. Zofnass's annual conference in New York has become an industry event and a Who's Who of cleanup firm CEOs.

The explosive growth of the cleanup business and engineers' traditional lack of financial skills have made Zofnass a hot commodity. "Engineers are incredibly financially unsophisticated," he says. "They were never trained that way because they didn't need to be."

The minefield of growth financing is a big consulting area. "You need computers and other tools to practice globally, and that takes cash," says William F. Brumund, president of Golder Associates, Atlanta. "We're a long way from the days when engineers were sole practitioners with pocket calculators."

Zofnass steered Dames & Moore through a complex \$115-million public offering a year ago, first having to convince its 76 nervous partners that "the

advantages outweighed the disadvantages," says D&M CFO Robert M. Perry.

For many firms, Zofnass offers a financial reality check and a chance to hone business acumen rather than hire it from the outside. "Many employees feel that if the CEO hasn't walked in their moccasins, he won't understand," says Brumund. But Zofnass concedes that teaching such skills isn't always easy. "Project managers want to be loved by the client so they don't collect the receivables," he says.

For Zofnass, 46, being a small entrepreneur is a big departure from his days as a managing director of Oppenheimer & Co., which he left in 1990 after 13 years. "The problem with investment banking is that you're always selling a product," he says. But also in the wings is his advisory network of financial chieftains and power lawyers, including former Kennedy Administration confidante Ted Sorensen.

Friends in high places is nothing new for Zofnass, who attended Harvard University and Army basic training with Vice President Al Gore. Zofnass is also in the prestigious group of Bill Clinton "FOBs," having known the president since first meeting in 1982 at the now annual Renaissance Weekend gatherings at Hilton Head, S.C. Zofnass and his psychologist sister Joan are occasional jogging partners with Clinton, and wife Renee, a corporate attorney, was offered a top administration job.

Even with his connections and financial savvy, Zofnass says he'll stay in the environmental engineering niche. "I'm most comfortable working one on one," he notes.

By Debra K. Rubin