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Restaurant franchisee leads the parade for veterans

Phoenix restaurant owner Jason LeVecke's efforts to fuel company vehicles with used cooking oil and to accept Mexican pesos in his pizza franchises have made headlines. His national chain of 130 franchise restaurants, including Carl's Jr., Hardee's and Pizza Patron in Arizona, Texas and five other states, has made millions.

But LeVecke's personal passion is helping veterans make successful transitions back to civilian life.

LeVecke, 37, and a south Phoenix resident, is this year's business community grand marshal for the Carl R. Hayden Veteran's Affairs Medical Center's Veterans Day Parade. LeVecke grew up in a family who owned restaurants. He earned his first paycheck as a Carl's Jr. cook and cashier.

In 1997, at age 26, he took a break from the food industry and joined the U.S. Marine Corps., serving as an Arabic linguist.

LeVecke returned to Phoenix and his restaurant career in 2002. He has drawn attention for a Carl's Jr. program to convert used vegetable oil into fuel and for a Pizza Patron promotion that has allowed customers to pay with Mexican pesos.

LeVecke also has become involved with the Valley's Veterans Medical Leadership Council, a non-profit organization that, among other things, raises money for social services for vets returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Some come back and make the transition with no problem," he said. "Others never had a mental or physical problem in their life and are coming back with trauma. What people don't understand is that while the medical care is taken care of, other pieces are missing."

LeVecke said some vets need help finding work. Others need assistance for a few months with their rent or mortgages. Others need counseling and social support.

Source: vmlc.net.

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