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Veteran benefits from pizza chain's help

Vet opens Little Caesars franchise in Stafford

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The memory of five years of "pizza pizza" every Friday night helped Richard Cozier decide that Little Caesars was the opportunity he was looking for.

During his 20 years in the Air Force, Cozier and his family were stationed for five years in South Carolina. They ate a lot of Little Caesars pizza, making him familiar with the product.

When Cozier and his wife started eyeing business opportunities after his retirement, Little Caesars was the one that stood out.

"I liked their program and their product," he said.

The North Stafford resident recently opened up one of the carry-out restaurants in the Stafford Marketplace off Garrisonville Road.

The "program" he mentioned is the Little Caesars Veteran Program. The program helps honorably discharged veterans with and without disabilities to start their own businesses, as a way of thanking veterans for their service.

According to Kathryn Oldham, communications director for Little Caesars, Cozier is the first veteran in Virginia to open up a store through the special program.

Oldham says the program came about after the founder of the international pizza chain, Michael Ilitch, saw a newspaper article about a disabled veteran who had just returned from Iraq. The veteran had lost both legs and was uncertain about his future.

Ilitch knew how he felt. As a young man, Ilitch played on a Detroit Tigers minor league baseball team. An injury off the field caused him to have to give up his baseball dreams.

Like the military veteran in the story, Ilitch was uncertain in what direction to go. Luckily his pizza career more than made up for his lack of baseball career. Today, Ilitch owns the Detroit Tigers.

Ilitch decided to help the young man in the story by giving him a Little Caesars franchise. After that worked out, he told his employees to find a way to help other veterans by making it easier for them to buy franchises.

To that end, Oldham says, Little Caesars offers \$10,000 in discounts and credits to nondisabled vets and up to \$68,000 for disabled veterans.

Richard Cozier became part of the 30 veterans that have been approved since the advent of the program in 2006.



Richard Crozier gets a pizza for a customer in his Stafford Little Caesar's, which he was able to open with incentives for being a veteran.

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Cozier went through about a 12-month process that involved filling out a lot of forms, going through interviews, and participating in a six-week training program.

"We've gotten great support from the Little Caesars people," he says.

Cozier thinks veterans bring things like self-discipline, strong leadership skills and attention to detail to the Little Caesars company.

His favorite thing about the business is the pace, with evening being the busiest time of day. His least favorite thing "is probably the dishes," he laughs.

But he has help in his wife, Linda, and their two children, Richie, 15, and Tara, 19.

"Everybody in the family works," he says.

For more information about the Little Caesars Veterans Program, go to franchise.littlecaesars.com.

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