

Coffee Leads to Conversations

An Iraq War veteran and VFW Life member in Arizona created his own veteran-inspired coffee company to honor veterans and active-duty troops

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After Jason Cvancara sold his security business in June 2021, the Air Force Reserve's chief master sergeant was undecided about his next business venture when his mother passed away.

The death of his beloved mother, Miriam, a British native who married his military father and immigrated to Minnesota, struck Cvancara hard. It was she whose devotion to an adopted country gave him the desire to join the Air Force, and her mantra always stayed with him.

"Do what you love,' she always used to say," said Cvancara, who spent eight years on active duty, 11 years with the Phoenix Police Department, as well as a combined 14 years in the Air Force Reserve to date. "My mom was an old British lady who loved tea," Cvancara recalled. "When I talk to people, it always, somehow, leads to my mom."

Cvancara sat with his mother's words through the grieving process, finding her inspirational life and mantra to provide the answer he needed — coffee.

Though passionate about many things, Cvancara's love of coffee had prompted him to buy his own equipment while serving as an officer in the Phoenix Police Department. He often brewed his own coffee while out on patrol, offering it to his fellow officers and sometimes even civilians in the spirit of enjoyable conversation.

"Coffee has always been a conversational tool," said Cvancara, a Life member of the VFW's Department of Arizona who earned his eligibility during a deployment with the 944th Security Forces Squadron to Kirkut, Iraq, in 2008. "I love coffee and wanted to create my own because station coffee did not taste good. It was not my intention to sell it at first, but everyone kept encouraging me to do so because they enjoyed the flavor profiles of my coffee."

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Taking a concoction of his mother's mantra and the encouragement of all who had tried his coffee over the years as fuel, Cvancara created the Zona Coffee Company in 2021 as a tribute to his mother, veterans and the people of Arizona.

"One thing I miss about being a police officer is being able to have conversations with random people that I otherwise wouldn't be having," Cvancara said. "Coffee helps to create those conversations as it is often a glue for our community. But it is even more than that."

Through Zona Coffee, which also distributes pancake mix and tea, Cvancara has donated more than 10 pounds of his signature Brrrrrt Blend, inspired by the A-10 Warthog, to deployed troops and those stationed stateside.

"We also donate \$1 for every Brrrrrt Blend bag sold to a veterans' organization of our choosing," Cvancara said. "I make a point to always serve free coffee at veterans' events, and I keep it available for all at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona, where I am stationed."

While still making amends with the economic climate stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, Cvancara's plan to have a storefront coffee house remains a work in progress. Instead, the Air Force veteran has relied on his military training to pivot and pursue other avenues.

"Learning how to organize and function at a high level under very stressful situations is why I was able to keep a business with all the problems COVID created," Cvancara said. "I wouldn't have been able to do that without my military training."

As of the publishing of this article, Zona Coffee (www.zonacoffeecompany.com) products are in grocery stores across Arizona, as well as online and always with Cvancara himself. The company, according to Cvancara, also is working on creating a canned coffee beverage they can distribute nationwide.

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