

**6TH GRADE WINNER:
ELLIOT M.
THE BARSTOW SCHOOL**

Imagine meeting a person who served in the army, fosters multiple homeless dogs, and helps the less fortunate people in the community. Sounds too good to be true, right? Well, prepare to be amazed by the one-and-only, Annika Aquino. Annika has made a substantial impact in her community and is one of the kindest people I have ever met. To me, Annika is the kindest Kansas Citian because she volunteers for dog rescue organizations, served multiple years in the U.S. Military, and offers free meals to low-income patrons at her brewery during the government shutdown.

Let us go back two years to when I met Annika Aquino and my family adopted our dog, Otis. Annika fostered Otis for several months as a part of her volunteer commitment to MAK German Shorthaired Pointer (GSP) Rescue Organization. As his foster mom, Annika helped Otis, a homeless and wayward dog, get to a healthy weight and paid for all of his vet bills before choosing us from the many applicants to be his forever family. On that day, my family and I did not realize we were adding more than a dog to our brood. Annika and her husband, Patrick, are now family friends who watch Otis when we are out of town and give us the “Otis discount” at their brewery. In addition to her service to the MAK GSP rescue, she also volunteers as a foster mom through other rescues, including the Save Our Setters Rescue. In total, Annika has fostered over 25 dogs. She sees the potential in all dogs, even those who are sullen and fickle due to past trauma. Her love and volunteer efforts with homeless pups is just one example of Annika’s kindness and generosity.

Annika Aquino served in the military for more than 24 years. During her time in the U.S. Army, Annika demonstrated her dedication to protecting our country in both active duty and by training new recruits. She had to move to many new cities and countries during these years. She did that without hesitation because she knew the importance of her commitment to serving her country. 24 years is a long time to serve and definitely shows her kindness and love for her country and fellow Americans.

Annika supports her local community in many ways, too. At her brewery, located in a rural area in South Kansas City, she has hosted fundraisers and catered events for the dog rescue organizations, community members who lost children unexpectedly in a car crash, and other worthy causes. If someone needs help, Annika is always available. Most recently, she has been providing free meals at her brewery to people that have limited funds due to the government shutdown. In her social media post, the post headline she used was: “We Are In This Together”. This sentiment is something Annika truly believes and demonstrates everyday through her kindness and service to others.

Annika Aquino is the kindest Kansas Citian because she volunteers for dog rescue organizations, served multiple years in the U.S. Military, and offers free meals to low-income patrons at her brewery during the government shutdown. Kindness is not just a character trait for Annika. It is a way of life. Her acts of kindness are not for acclaim or recognition, she does these things because it is truly who she is at her core– the ultimate kindest Kansas Citian.