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## [Local Connections](#)

### Buffalo Grove Resident is a 'Secret Millionaire'

But now the secret's out. Steve Kaplan will be featured Sunday on ABC's philanthropic reality show, in which wealthy people go undercover to assist charitable organizations.

By [Cristel Mohrman](#) | [Email the author](#) | June 28, 2012

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Buffalo Grove resident [Steve Kaplan](#) doesn't make a habit of flaunting his wealth. Sure, he has a nice home and cars and enjoys traveling, he said, but until recently, his own nieces and nephews didn't realize he had millions.

The secret is out now.

Kaplan, 52, will be featured Sunday on ABC's reality show [Secret Millionaire](#), which profiles a citizen who goes undercover to volunteer with charitable organizations. After several days of donating manpower and getting to know the people who run and benefit from the organizations, the volunteer comes clean, admitting he is a millionaire and making a financial contribution to the charities.

Kaplan, the author of two best-selling business books, a co-producer of Broadway's [Leap of Faith](#), and an entrepreneur, said he was in Los Angeles to discuss an idea for his own reality show when he was invited to participate in *Secret Millionaire*.

As the other undercover millionaires featured on the show, Kaplan did not know where he'd be sent to conduct his philanthropic work. While it turned out his destination was just a train ride away, his six nights in Chicago's Roseland neighborhood felt like a world away from Buffalo Grove, where he moved 22 years ago to raise his family.

Roseland's "like the murder capital of Illinois. It's brutal there," he said. "Every night I would hear gunshots. Every night. It was nuts."

"I'm not a pretentious guy at all. I've seen a lot of poverty. But I was not at all prepared for what I saw," he said.

He assumed an impoverished lifestyle, living on a \$47 weekly welfare budget. Sustenance wasn't the problem ("I got a big thing of Cap'n Crunch and some ramen noodles — I went back to college," he said); it was the idle time, without the luxury of electronics and other entertainment that wore him down.

"For me, it was the isolation," Kaplan said.

## **Giving Back**

When he wasn't isolated, Kaplan was out working in the community. He identified three organizations that would benefit from his participation, told them he was being filmed for a documentary about volunteers, and put his days into helping [Bin Donated](#), [Kids Off The Block](#) and [H.O.M.E.](#) (Housing Opportunities and Maintenance for the Elderly).

For [Bin Donated](#), he hauled barrels used to collect leftover toiletries from hotels; at [H.O.M.E.](#), he cleaned a patio and a basement, helped rewire electricity and prepared breakfast. That last task, he said, "was challenging, if you know my skills in the kitchen."

While working with [Kids Off The Block](#), "I did some really heart-wrenching things. We helped to build a memorial to people who have fallen victim to gang shootings," he said.

At the end of his volunteer assignments, it was time for Kaplan to confess that he wasn't an ordinary volunteer. "You have to tell them you're a millionaire. You have to say those words," he said. "The first thing is quiet. Everyone's stunned. Then they go nuts. It's so much fun."

Kaplan could not reveal how much money he donated to each organization, but he said he provided some computers and other equipment in addition to the cash contributions, which will be announced on the show. [Secret Millionaire](#) airs at 7 p.m. July 1 on ABC.

The community is invited to join Kaplan at a viewing party from 6 to 9 p.m. Sunday at Moe's Cantina in Chicago. Tickets are [\\$100 in advance](#) or \$125 at the door. Proceeds will be divided among the three charities.

#### What's Next?

Kaplan said he's donated money to various causes over the years, but aside from coaching for the [Buffalo Grove Bills](#) and [Buffalo Grove Recreation Association](#) when his kids, Madison and Ryan, were younger, he hasn't spent much time doing hands-on volunteer work.

He said he's remained involved with all three organizations since the show was taped nine months ago. Bin Donated is particularly in close contact; the organization now uses some of Kaplan's office space in River North.

"I think you have a responsibility to set the right value on things. I think there's too much made of people who have money. It's what you do with it, it's not having it" that's important, he said.

"I believe there's a huge difference between being wealthy and being rich. Working with people on a one-on-one level adds to the richness of your life," he said.

Kaplan, who describes himself as a "business and life turnaround expert," said he still plans to pursue his idea for the TV show that he put on hold upon joining *Secret Millionaire*.

"I know I want it to be something to help people. Maybe work with people who are down and out and then turn them around. Something in that vein," he said.

"I'm just pursuing my passions and helping people along the way."

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