



## PULSE

PAGE 17 | CHICAGO SUN-TIMES | SATURDAY, JUNE 30, 2012

# pulse

The best Chicago entertainment & culture

### MAINTAINING A PRESENCE

Philanthropist and Buffalo Grove resident Steve Kaplan (center) spent a week in the Roseland neighborhood while filming "Secret Millionaire." He remains involved in the community almost a year later. | ABC/JEAN WHITESIDE-AP



# KINDLY CAMERA

## Entrepreneur finds charity begins 'off the block' in Roseland



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**S**teve Kaplan lives about 40 miles from the city's Roseland community. But as he put it, it might as well be 40,000 miles.

A wealthy businessman, public

speaker and author, Kaplan lives in a swanky Buffalo Grove house tricked out with an Olympic-size swimming pool and movie theater. He traded in those cosseted confines to spend a week living in the crime-ridden, gang-infested South Side 'hood for ABC's "Secret Millionaire," airing at 7 p.m. Sunday on WLS-Channel 7.

The show follows deep-pocketed do-gooders as they go incognito and volunteer in some of the country's most impoverished, blighted areas. The mission of these 1 percenters is to find deserving people dedicated to helping others and — in what's usually a tear-filled,

### VIEWING PARTY

Watch "Secret Millionaire" with Kaplan and others featured in the show at a fund-raiser from 6 to 9 p.m. Sunday at Moe's Cantina, 155 W. Kinzie. Tickets, which include dinner and drinks, cost \$100 (\$125 at the door) and can be purchased online at [SteveKaplanLive.com](http://SteveKaplanLive.com). Kaplan said all proceeds will go to local charities.

dramatic climax — cut them fat checks when the week is up. Kaplan, 52, who grew up in Des

Plaines, describes himself as a "business and life turnaround expert." He's owned and sold dozens of companies over the years. And he's turned a nice profit teaching others how to be successful through public speaking gigs and by penning books like his 2005 best-seller, *Bag the Elephant*. More recently, he was one of the producers for the Tony-nominated (and Broadway box office flop) "Leap of Faith."

Kaplan was in Los Angeles shopping around ideas for his own TV show when a production company suggested he give "Secret Millionaire" a try. No stranger to

charitable giving, he jumped at the opportunity.

When the cab pulled up to his Buffalo Grove home, the divorced dad had no idea where the show was sending him. He just knew it would be somewhere very different from home.

"The taxi turned by Howard Street and left me by the L tracks," he said. "I was given a slip of paper with an address, a train ticket and a map. I ended up taking the Red Line all the way until it ended at 95th Street. I had 20 more blocks, walking with my bag, with people

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## MILLIONAIRE

yelling 'Welcome to hell!'

Hell turned out to be a pretty accurate description of Kaplan's living quarters.

"It was horrible," he said. "There was a mattress on the floor, blood on the walls, bars on the windows. The electricity didn't work. You have no music, no books, no TV, no phone, no computer."

What he did have: the sound of gunshots and sirens lulling him to sleep each night.

Masquerading as a filmmaker doing a documentary on volunteering, Kaplan met some neighborhood kids playing hoops nearby. They introduced him to an after-school program called Kids Off the Block, or KOB.

Roseland resident Diane Latiker started KOB nearly a decade ago when she turned her living room into a community center for at-risk teens. The idea is to help kids with their schoolwork and funnel their energy into things like sports and music rather than gangs and drugs.

Latiker's group was in the middle of rebuilding a memorial of tombstones dedicated to young victims of violence. She happily welcomed Kaplan as a volunteer, although she admits to getting "a little huffy" when his "documentary" camera crew seemed more interested in filming Kaplan — and not the kids — doing the work.

"They really pulled a good one over on us," Latiker said, after finding out Kaplan's real identity — and motive.

When Kaplan finally spilled the beans, "I think I didn't talk for five minutes," Latiker recalled. She remembers being shocked that someone would leave a life of luxury, even temporarily, to move into a place like he did.

Kaplan shared with a couple of other Chicago charities, too, including a low-income senior citizen living community and an organization that collects everyday items and distributes them to homeless shelters and similar places in need.

The show finished taping almost a year ago. The cameras may have disappeared, but Kaplan hasn't. One of the charities now shares the River North office space where he runs his company, Steve Kaplan Live. He also drops by KOB to check up on Latiker and the kids and to play some hoops — on a new state-of-the-art basketball court he paid for.

Kaplan ended up shelling out more money on the charities than he thought he would. And it was worth every penny, he said. "What I paid vs. what I got?" he asked. "I came out so far ahead."