

SECRET SANTA REVEALED

The Secret Santa has been revealed—it's Larry Stewart, 58, a successful businessman from Lee's Summit, Missouri. Prior to the Christmas season of 2006, Stewart announced that he is the Secret Santa who has been anonymously doling out \$100 bills to the needy every Christmas for the past 26 years.

Stewart says he decided to go public after it became apparent that a tabloid newspaper was going to reveal his name. Now, he hopes to inspire others to become Secret Santas. So how did this practice begin?

In the winter of 1971, Stewart was working as a door-to-door salesman. The company he was working for went out of business, and he quickly ran out of money. Stewart hadn't eaten in two days when he went to Dixie Diner and ordered a breakfast he eventually admitted he couldn't pay for. Ted Horn, the restaurant owner, sympathized with Stewart. He acted as though he found a \$20 bill on the floor underneath of Stewart's chair. "Son, you must have dropped this," Horn said.

"It was like a fortune to me," Stewart reflected. "I said to myself, 'Thank you, Lord.' Right then, I just made a promise. I said, 'Lord, if you ever put me in a position to help other people, I will do it.'"

Over the years, Stewart estimates that he has given away around \$1.3 million. He says he has been amply rewarded in return. "I see the smiles and looks of hopelessness turn to looks of hope in an instant," he says. "After all, isn't that what we're put here on earth for—to help one another?"