



## Bob Kerr



## Bob Kerr: It's Obscure but somehow very close

01:00 AM EDT on Wednesday, September 6, 2006

The members of The Obscure Company will meet on Saturday.

The first item on the agenda is: Sit.

The second item on the agenda is: Sit.

And the 3rd through the 15th item on the agenda is, of course, Sit.

The Obscure Company has a mission. It is to find significance in the insignificant, to draw the serious from the silly, to turn the zany into the beneficial.

So when the members finally rise from their seats in the old carousel building in Goddard Park in Warwick Saturday, they will have sat on their butts all day -- and raised thousands of dollars for a very good cause.

The founders of The Obscure Company once set up a living room on a grassy strip near Routes 95 and 10 in Providence on a summer day in 1999. They put down a rug, a card table, a radio, a lamp, a cooler filled with soda, a coffee table and a radio. There were three of them. They played some cards. They held up a sign that said "Honk If You Like Sitting." The driver of an SUV pulled up, looked at them, and drove away. A police officer pulled up, asked what they were doing, and pulled away.

It was the first sit-a-thon. This Saturday, the tradition continues.

"It's a break from what I do every day," says Mark Colwell, an original member of The Obscure Company. "I get to see friends and help in a small way."

Colwell was there on the porch in Cranston more than seven years ago when he, his brother, John, and friends tried to think of something to do for the sake of doing it. They thought it would be funny, maybe even fascinating, to do something that would cause others to stop and say "hey, aren't you the guys . . .?"

They thought about putting their picture on a billboard, maybe the sides of buses. It would be a small tribute to the power of whimsy. But too much money was required.

So, in their collective teenage imagination, they created The Obscure Company.

"The point was to have a company without a real goal," says Tom Douglass.

But then, despite their best efforts, the irrelevant turned relevant. A cause claimed them. And it was a cause close to home.

"Two years before, our mother died of breast cancer," says John Colwell.

In the summer of 2000, they went to the Temple to Music in Roger Williams Park and did a 12-hour sit-a-thon.

They raised \$800 for the American Cancer Society. They were on their way to turning the pursuit of creative inaction into charitable profit.

Last year, the sit-a-thon raised \$3,600. The Obscure Company now focuses its efforts on Camp Hope for kids with cancer in North Scituate. This year, the company hopes to raise more than \$6,000.

The rules are simple. Participants sit -- for 12 hours, maybe less if the body cries out for standup relief. Four bathroom breaks are allowed. Sponsors sign up.

The members of the company are in their 20s now. They all hold down day jobs. Douglass is getting married soon. But there is still room for the shared enjoyment of doing something strange for something good.

You can check in at [www.obscurecompany.com](http://www.obscurecompany.com). Or you can head for Goddard Park on Saturday. You can chat with a member of The Obscure Company, which then entitles you to tell all your friends that you were chatting with a member of The Obscure Company.

And your friends will no doubt ask what the heck The Obscure Company is.

And you can try to explain.

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