



# Party Line

*breaking the future  
of telephony wide open*

Issue 7, Spring 2022



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## Contributors

Thanks to our Public Telephone Hosts: G. Upshaw, xnor, M. Hansen, Daniels Memorial, Lesley Harper, Landline Creative, Saluthaus, Sebastian Noack, J. Mejia, and Tishbite.

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**Regional Arts & Culture Council**

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# Support Futel!

Support us by subscribing on Patreon, buying a T-shirt or button, buying Party Line issues 1-5 from Microcosm Publishing, or making a PayPal donation courtesy of CTRLH, see our website. Futel is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Potential installation host? Contact us. Want to hack on Futel? See our repositories on Github. Creator of interactive audio art? We can help you implement your ideas in this exciting new format.

Dial 0 from any Futel phone, or speak to the operator at 503–468–1337, or email us at [operator@futel.net](mailto:operator@futel.net), or see our website at <http://futel.net>. Thanks to everyone who has supported Futel!



**PHONE TYPES**

- 1. Pedestal payphone
- 2. Wall payphone
- 3. Stainless steel phone on a post
- 4. Various wall, mobile, and desk phones
- 5. Custom speaker, directory, and autodialing phones



**PHONE FEATURES**

- Free calls to North America
- Directory of interesting numbers
- Directory of public service numbers
- Live operator assistance
- Interactive audio art

**CUSTOM MENUS AND CONTENT**

- Location-specific features
- Custom menus
- Time-based usage restrictions

**BANDWIDTH REQUIREMENTS**

- 115 KBPS while in use
- Wirelessly provisioned at some locations

**POWER REQUIREMENTS**

- 12 watts 0.2 amps while in use
- Low power and renewable power available at some locations

# 2021 Damage Report

It has been another hard year for many as the people and leaders of the United States continue their craven shuffle towards overt fascism. It is an ugly time and that ugliness is spilling out as the general effects of poverty, desperation, and general nihilism ramp up. Public-oriented organizations like Futel have borne the brunt of people lashing out.

Dealing with wear and attrition has always been part of the job, just as hostile action is part of the urban environment our installations inhabit. We haven't emphasized the damage because we are proud of the work we do to keep our phones operational. We leave them out on the street all night, and we keep them running, which not only lets us provide valuable services, but also interact with a very wide range of people, the kind of audience that most artists and communicators could never reach. Whining does not further our mission. Also, there have always been people on the internet jeering at us about how our phones won't last and we are doomed, and we will not give satisfaction to the losing side like that.

So we give thanks for all the good chaos we have been fortunate to be involved with, and we deal with the bad chaos, year after year.

The most impressive part of this one is the coin return slot, and also that the enclosure is not at all damaged. This must have involved a 3-foot crowbar. The assailant may have been trying to break into the vault, which is not going to happen with the tools they had. Incidentally, breaking into the vault is never going to give a good return on the expenses involved.



Two dudes drove up in a minivan, took a hit off their pipe, and started cutting into the pedestal with a reciprocating saw, then preferred to leave rather than be approached. Also not an economical pursuit. Skeezy scrapyards will take that, sure, but the kind of person who would saw off a pedestal is going to have to try to break into the phone and see what's inside it. The work is going to use up a lot of bits and blades, and they won't have proper eye or ear protection.

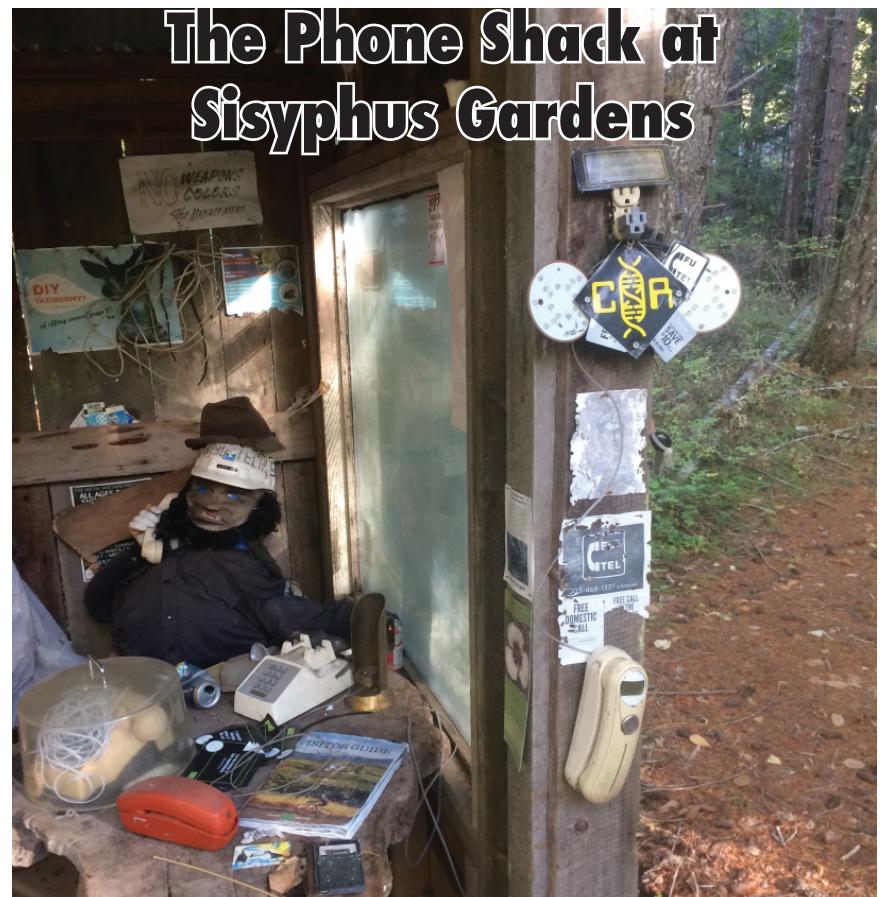
This poor man spent a lot of time smashing the phone with a rock while being observed by a warehouse worker on a smoke break. This is sad. He must have busted up his hands. It sucks to have to replace a phone, but that's not even the worst part of this situation.

Even when it is stupid the graffiti on the phones and enclosures is usually at least interesting because the scenery continuously changes. And a lot of it is fun. There has been slightly more racist and fascist graffiti this year but it gets covered quickly, thanks.

Look at this phone. Nothing is getting into this phone. Actually, the handset remains the weak part, right now they're \$20 plus expenses and an hour to replace. And, of course, the marquee.



## The Phone Shack at Sisyphus Gardens



In recent years they've added another extension in their kitchen, but your calls will still ring here. Also, there is more than one Druid of Sisyphus Gardens staffing the line these days. Callers cannot choose which one they will get. They are all qualified to provide wisdom. Also, lucky Futel phone users who visit after their rounds in town may find tokens and artwork they have left behind.

The Druid of Sisyphus Gardens has been an entry in the Futel directory from the beginning because they are probably having different experiences than the people who call, and who could be more worthwhile to talk to than that sometimes? Sisyphus Gardens is a many-leveled rural complex with a phone line but no municipal power or water. It is well fortified but its denizens have survived more due to gentleness and fortitude than force of arms, being the remnants of an anarchist community, the members of which perhaps did not bow and bend as much as they could have. Who can say? And too much has probably been said, especially by this simple urban telephone company administrator. Call them yourself from any Futel phone and ask about their habitats for human-eating forest denizens or the cannibals down the road.

## **September**

Operator left voicemail, from a new phone in NOPO. No call-back number yet.

## **September**

Two Callers asked questions about Futel. Second Caller asked if I flushed after peeing. Explained that the Druids do not have toilets nor do they pee into potable water.

## **October**

Child caller sounded distant. hi... hello! HELLO! I can't hear you! Talked to parent who said they were walking in their neighborhood.

## **October**

Detroit called, we chatted about Fall and the yellow leaves.

## **October 31**

Children callers left a voicemail wanting to know what breast implants are made out of.

## **November**

Caller called just as I was headed to the mailbox. Passed the phone to the other Druid, caller promptly hung up.

## **December**

Detroit left a voicemail. For the first time, there wasn't a Druid to answer (for them). Hope to hear from you soon!



# **TELECOM SALVAGE**

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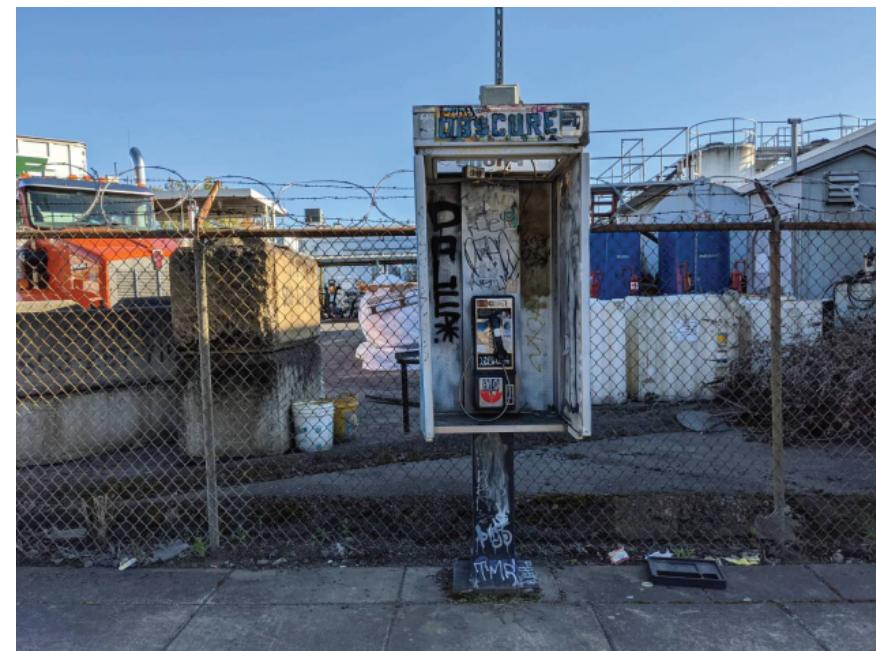


# **Life of the Payphone!**

This Portland payphone works for both outgoing and incoming calls. In 2020, it was regularly sanitized by the Futel Secretary of Hygiene and Sanitation.

Next time you flex your commercial fuel card privileges for self-serve diesel at Tyree Oil in North Portland, give it a ring.

Photo by breedx.



# **Heinous Intellectual Property Crime Targets Futel**

**Nothing of Value Stolen  
Except the Attention of Those Who Continue Reading**

A wannabe maker celebrity in another country recently pretended to launch a vaporware project that rips off Futel. This doesn't really affect anything, and in fact it feels refreshing after the more threatening attention from morons on the internet of the past couple years. It is perhaps interesting as an example of the kind of low energy grifts we all need to filter out every day.

There is an attempted influencer of the type familiar to the maker and hacker communities. There is a blog with pictures of a well-stocked workshop and descriptions of impressive projects, but no demonstrations. The visible output is logos, mission statements, and other self-promotion. There is a YouTube channel, a TED talk, and a human interest story on a local



## **July 21**

Caller expressed great joy. They had just spoken to Operator and was excited to use all features of Futel. Caller drove 5 hours from Pittsburgh to use the Detroit Futel! They found out about it on the internet. Asked for Druidic knowledge to take back to Pittsburgh, extolled the virtues of Beavers as a keystone species. Wished them a fun telephoney time.

## **July 29**

At 8 AM Caller on a Portland Futel wanted to thank me for the inspiration to make it to Portland by bicycle. I said oh no! Was it really smokey? Yes it was. I apologized. Good luck on your trip to Astoria!

## **August At 3 AM**

Caller asked if I spoke Gaelic. No. Oh, are you working? Uh, no, I'm a bit broken. Caller was trying to call a random concentration camp, but that wasn't working either. Directed them to try again. Caller thanked me and wished good night.

## **August**

Caller left a voicemail. Caller wasn't sure why they wanted to talk to the Druid, but they heard a lot about it, and ran really far to call. Sometimes we need someone to talk to who isn't really ... there. Call back! Sometimes Druids are standing by.



# Druid of Sisyphus Gardens Log

2021 was marked by an increased interest in Druids and the Futel services. This took the form of experienced Futel users, blossoming friendships from repeat callers (what's up Detroit!), and possibly a disappointed conspiracy theorist. As usual, many of our records are missing. Here's what we got.

## Feb 13

Detroit called back. Caller gave the phone to their friend to receive some Druidic advice for the New Year, I wasn't feeling particularly wise or witty so I consulted the rocks. The rocks said "Be kind to others. And yourself!" So I guess they weren't feeling particularly creative either.

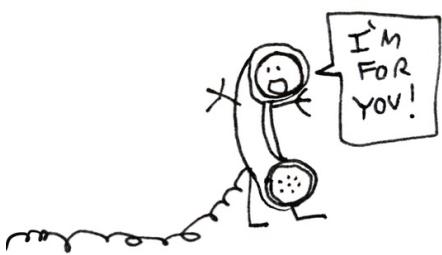


image: Mykle Hansen

## March

Caller wanted to know what the Druid's phone looks like. It's a clear plastic phone from the 90s, like from Clarissa Tells It All. Caller said they became an architect because of the dad from that show.

## April 7th

Caller left a voicemail from St. Johns, curious if anybody would pick up on the Druid line. "This is pretty neat and made my day."

## June 4th

Caller asked how I found myself on the end of a Druid Hotline? Gave them info on my life. Told them of a DIY Magic the Gathering card I altered. Caller was wearing a MTG t-shirt, but never played. We agreed Futel is the best art project in Portland.

## June 5th

Caller from Detroit asked for Druidic advice for their coast to coast bicycle trip they were on. Provided advice. I requested they call from a Futel node when they reached Portland.

## June 6th

Child caller said hello, asked what I was doing. I provided information. Exchanged names, and they said they had to go. I said to call back anytime.

## June 18th

Caller asked if I knew of or heard the term "bitch feet." I hadn't and couldn't provide further information, as I had no internet access. They said I use the demultiplexer and hung up.

## June 20th

Caller asked about the Druid and "what is your job?" Provided information about my life. Caller asked how to pay me money and couldn't provide information. Instead directed them to donate to Futel. Thanked and appreciated each other, and wished a good night.

television program. There are speeches about education and "giving back," but nothing of substance is shared, only the assertion that the influencer's work should be inspiring.

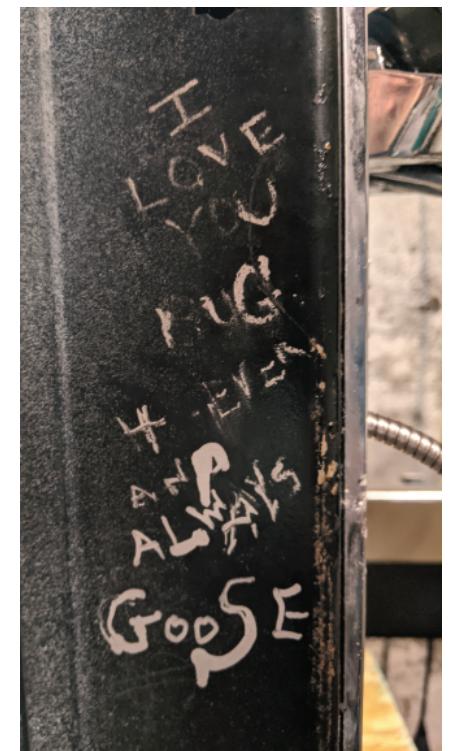
In this case, the fake project is a near exact copy of Futel. It even includes the opportunity to apologize! But there isn't any substance behind the hype. We are shown stock photos of payphones accompanied by a voiceover describing imminent achievements. We can see the single instance of actual tangible work, presented on a clean workbench — a payphone with some colored lights in the enclosure and a tablet ziptied to the front.

The angle is unclear and the strategy doesn't make any sense. All the hype is vapid, but it doesn't take any less time to produce because of it. The most banal part of the project is stolen, the easy part, the idea. The boring part, the marketing, still has to be done. What is the reward? YouTube and Google ad income which is a fraction of a real wage, and a puff piece TV appearance? And this can't be leveraged into a career as a true influencer, media host, or even role model, because there aren't any accomplishments to show. Our villain isn't able to put in the actual work which could grow a real project, otherwise it would have been done and showed off already. That's actual content, the kind of thing that could be monetized successfully.

That is why none of this really matters. This kind of person is never going anywhere. Think about actual accomplished maker media personalities, like Adam Savage or Jeri Ellsworth. They

are always describing their projects, not just their successes, but their failures, and the cheats and shortcuts where they fake it until everything can come together. They show us how they do things, they don't just talk about how great their ideas are.

It is annoying that someone feels comfortable lifting our schtick. Are we that obscure? The only really infuriating part is the attempt to subvert the relationships between Futel and other creators, both partnerships and homages, by lumping everything together and claiming it. We are always careful to promote and support our collaborators and inspirations, and publicity is often the only thing we can give them. Most egregiously, to watch some clown attempt to claim any aspect of



the Apology Line as their own work because they learned about it from us causes anger. Allan Bridge actually created something, you will find better success by acknowledging his work than by looking like a cheap imitator. Hey, Marissa Bridge recently released a podcast about Allan Bridge and the Apology Line, go support her.

But the confusing part is why anyone would feel the need to imitate us at all. Futel is a very open organization. Our code and operations are visible. So are our expenses, planning, project ideas, and grant proposals, successful and unsuccessful. It's all linked from our website. You don't have to steal our ideas, we are giving them away. When we started out we put everything in public repositories because it was easier

to work that way. We didn't expect anybody to notice, and didn't imagine that anybody else would think it was fun to run a phone company, but if you want to do it yourself, you don't even have to build your own, we will give you ours. We will work for you. You can run it for real! Your name will be at the top of the masthead and you can pay yourself whatever you want. Call us today! Dial 0 from any Futel phone!



## Death of the Payphone



I wasn't interested in telling them. Caller asked me what questions they could ask me, I replied that I was an operator who could help them use the Futel phone. Caller asked how they could learn more about the phones, I directed them to the website. Caller asked how long that phone was there, asked if I was a volunteer operator, etc.

### 2021-08-10

Caller was new to the phone, was excited about it and just wanted to say that.



### 2021-08-22

Caller wanted the number for her boyfriend Harry Belafonte, the famous musician and actor, who was late picking her up from the hospital.

### 2021-08-21

Caller and I exchanged several hellos, then when I asked if I could help them caller said they wanted to call someone. I told them to hang up and choose 1 for a dialtone.

### 2021-08-5

Caller asked for more information about what sounded like 'The Willamette Valley Train Survey' which was an option in the Futel directory (later determined 'train' may have been 'dream'). She wanted to know who was gathering the information and for what purpose. I didn't have information about this option and why it was part

of the Futel directory.

### 2021-09-02

All I can hear is your breathing, do you need an oprator?

### 2021-09-07

Caller wanted to know how much a call to a specific area code would cost, I told them to hang up and enter 1 for a dialtone and not put any money in.

2021-09-09 Caller wanted the number for tracfone, which I provided. Caller asked me ot hold on and mumbled for a while, then asked for the number again.

### 2021-09-10

Caller wanted the number for tracfone, which I provided eventually. The call was pretty noisy so it took a while to figure out what the caller was saying.

### 2021-09-21

Caller asked to make a call, I told them to hang up and dial 1.

### 2021-10-19

Caller seemed to be telling me that the phone was not working properly, the call was too distorted to tell.

### 2021-11-10

Caller mumbled confusedly.

### 2021-11-14

Light breathing.

### 2021-11-23

Caller requested the number of a Multnomah County animal shelter, which I provided.

### 2021-11-25

Caller asked for the phone number for an individual, which I may have been able to look up with a search engine.

### 2021-12-21

Caller wanted the number for Broadway Cab.

know what tree they were standing under. The Operator told the caller their favorite tree and they exchanged a few other tree preferences before ending the call.



### 2021-05-13

Caller asked what day it was.

### 2021-05-19

Caller wanted to know what this phone was and Operator let him know it could make calls for free and asked if they could help with anything. Caller said he was trying to reach the police station downtown. Operator found a number for Portland Police downtown. Caller said that was not the number he had. Operator searched the number the caller gave and it was for the Multnomah County Justice Center downtown. Operator asked what happened when the Caller tried that number before, they said the screen of their phone was cracked, so they had trouble. Operator advised hanging up and trying that number using the Futel phone. Caller agreed and ended the call.

### 2021-05-22

Caller asked me to look up a residential number in Texas, I found what might be the correct number.

### 2021-05-22

Caller gave me their name and said they were going taking busses around

town trying to take photos of all the phones for a blog post. They wondered if there was any way to get access to the phone at r2d2. I said I didn't know but you could maybe just go and ask.

### 2021-06-04

Caller wanted to call Southeast Asia. Alas, outside of our free calling area.

### 2021-06-17

Caller said they couldn't find the directory entry for the mayor, I told them to try again.

### 2021-06-20

Caller asked for the number of the University of Michigan hospital, which I provided.

### 2021-06-23

Caller asked me to connect them to the druid. I said I can't do that but there is a menu option for it and told them good luck.



### 2021-07-05

Caller did not expect to reach a person and did not have a request prepared.

### 2021-07-07

Caller presented the operator with a hypothetical.

### 2021-08-02

Caller asked "where are you at?" I replied that it didn't matter and asked if I could help them. Caller replied "yeah, where are you at?" I hung up.

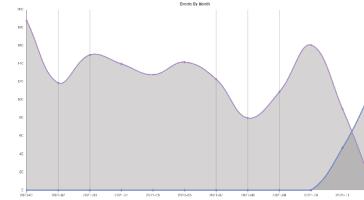
### 2021-08-02

Caller asked my location, I replied that

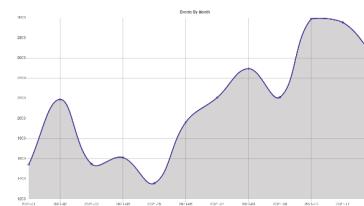
# Futel Activity 2021

These graphs all show two events, this is an artifact from an implementation change which we don't want to correct for, or even figure out how to display as a more understandable stacked bar chart, because we're retiring this software anyway.

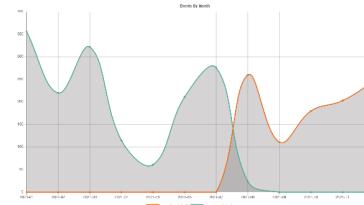
### Incoming calls to 503-HOT-1337



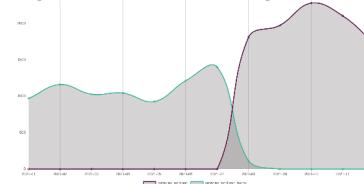
### Handset pickups on any public Futel phone



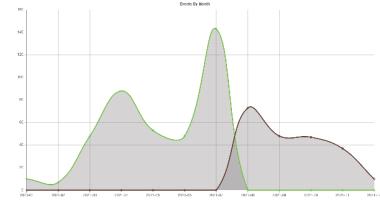
### Handset pickups on the Detroit phone



### Handset pickups on any public Portland phone

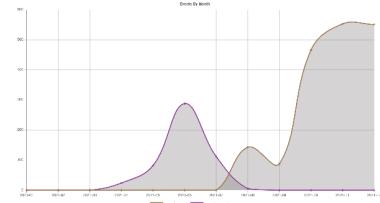


### Handset pickups on the Seaview phone



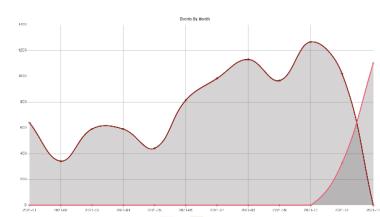
### Handset pickups on the Ypsilanti phone

This phone was disabled until March, then usage quickly resumed.

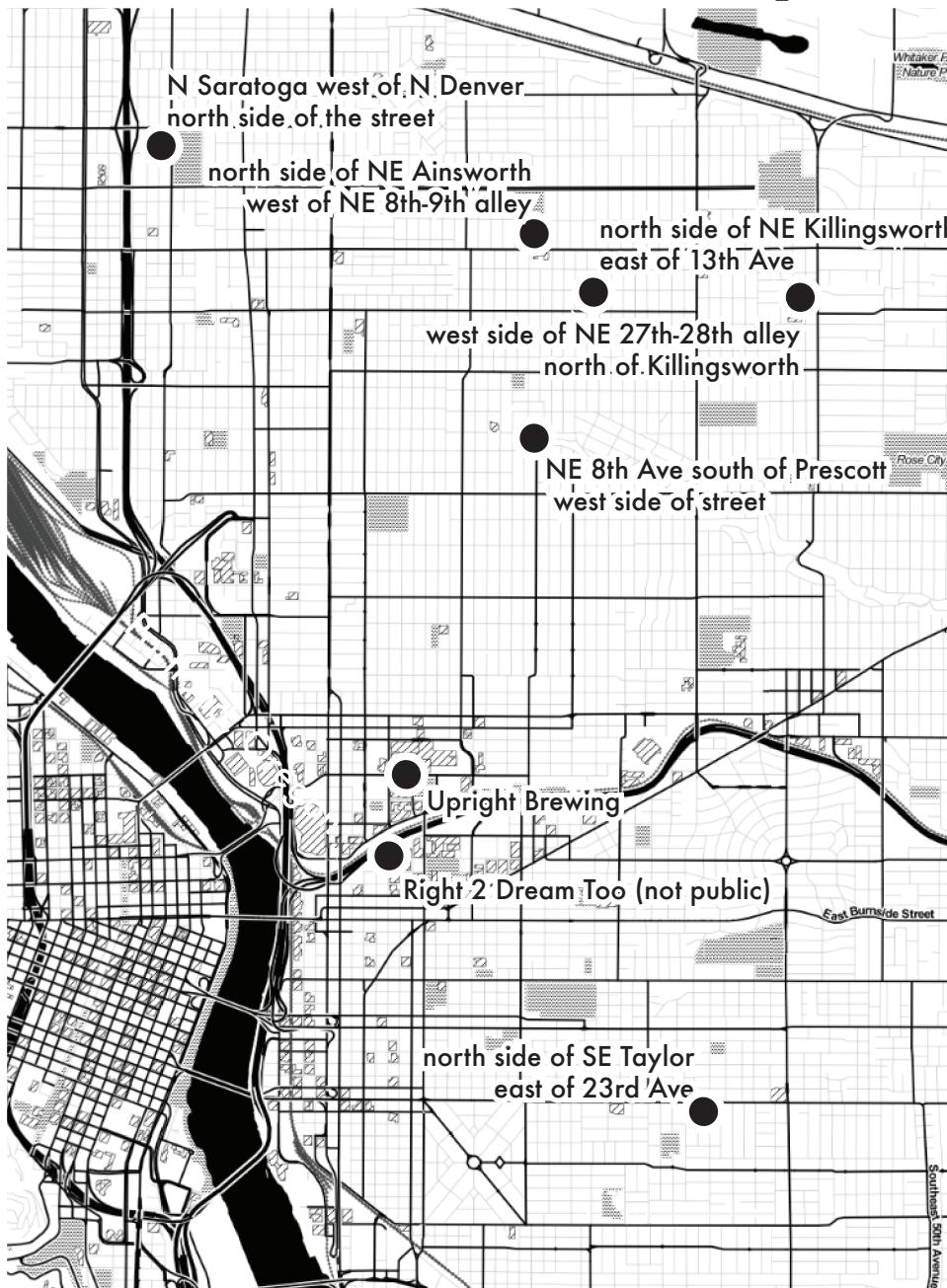


### Successfully dialed outgoing calls from a dialtone

Does not include numbers not entered by the user including directory calls and the Payphone Demultiplexer. Outgoing calls increased about 50 percent over the year, peaking at over 40 calls a day.



# 2021 Futel Service Map



Service Map as of January 13, 2022  
created with OpenStreetMap & Stamen's Toner tileset CC-BY-SA

they should check the directory and that they can make free calls all over North America. They said, for like an hour or something, I said why not. They told me to have a good weekend.



**2021-04-13**

Caller informed operator her name.

**2021-04-14**

Caller wanted to know WHO IS FU-TEL!? also, how to pronounce futel.

**2021-04-14**

Caller was surprised that the phone worked, didn't really need anything but was generally excited about the phone's existence and functionality.

**2021-04-16**

Caller asked if this was the State of Oregon Unemployment Division. I said "No, this is the operator for Futel," and the caller said "oh sorry man" and hung up.

**2021-04-25**

Caller said they wanted to order a pizza. I told them to just yell out their order and hung up as they were yelling it.

**2021-4-25**

Caller was a child pranking for pizza. I told the child that I didn't have any pizza because I was just inside of a payphone.

**2021-4-25**

The same child called and said he needed the ghostbusters. When asked how many ghosts there were the child

counted up to 16 ghosts. The child was told to run.

**2021-04-25**

Caller was just generally excited about and interested in Futel. They are making their rounds to all the Portland phones, only have 2 left I think.

**2021-04-28**

Caller asked the Operator for the phone number of an individual in another city. Operator was not able to find this information readily on the internet but thanked the caller for using Futel.

**2021-05-01**

Heard some buzzing noise and then what seemed like a childs voice say 'Hey' and then a hang up.



**2021-05-02**

Caller called to say "I love you."

**2021-05-02**

Heard a recorded song, then the handset being hung up. Also, the buzz made the line sound like crap.

**2021-05-02**

Heard the receiving end of an ANI call, then the sound of someone listening for a moment as I watched a movie before the caller hung up.

**2021-05-05**

Heard some buzzing sounds and an echo of my voice.

**2021-05-13**

Caller asked the Operator what their favorite tree was and let the Operator

# 2021 Operator Log Excerpts

Six operators logged over fifty operator calls in 2021. Some were goofy and some were dead serious. This sample of logged calls has some sensitive and many less interesting examples removed.



**2021-01-01**

Caller asked for room 44, or 44g, or IG44 unit. Offered to Google. Caller apologized, hung up.

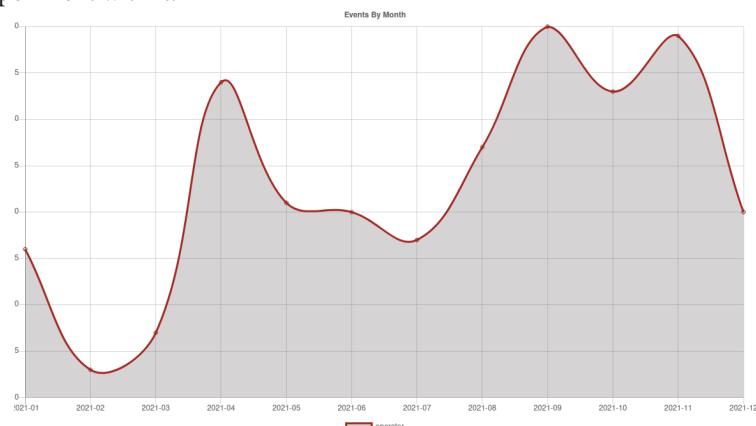
**2021-01-16**

Caller asked if I made FuteL, I replied that I was an operator who could provide information about how to use the phone. Caller asked what the phone was for, I told them they were free to experiment with it.



**2021-04-02**

Caller was surprised to find a phone, was just curious about it. Told them



This graph is not so useful because it includes any call which begins to ring 12 the operators, whether or not the user hangs up before pickup.

**2021-02-27**

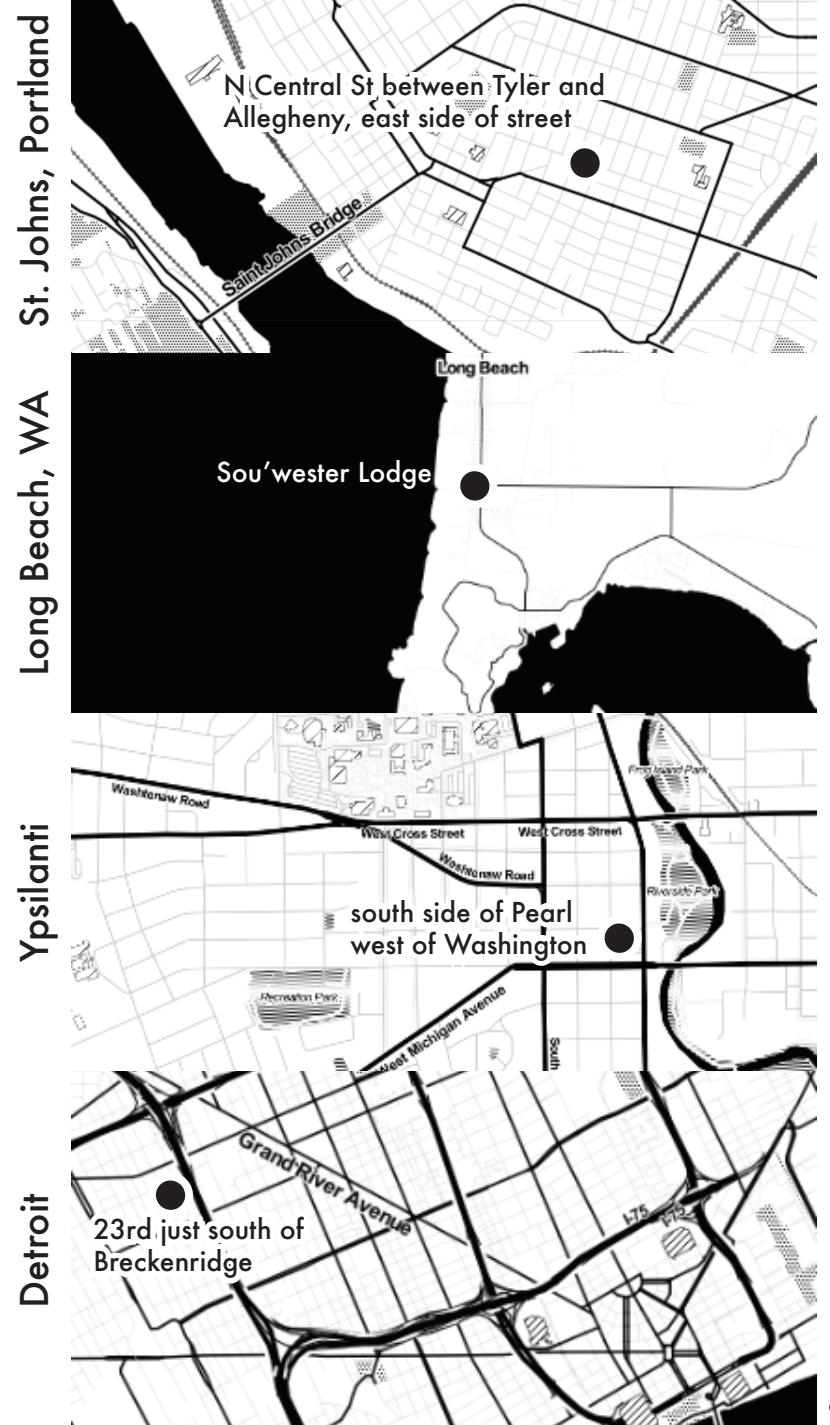
Looked up the number for Oregon DMV.

**2021-03-01**

Caller asked how to call the Willamette Valley Dream Survey, I told them to use the directory.

**2021-03-20**

Caller asked what I knew about the WVDS(ugh). I told him the truth, that we found a phone number on a flyer and added it to a directory. He said "Interesting. Thanks..."... is it?



# New Phone!

N Saratoga Street West of Denver



10

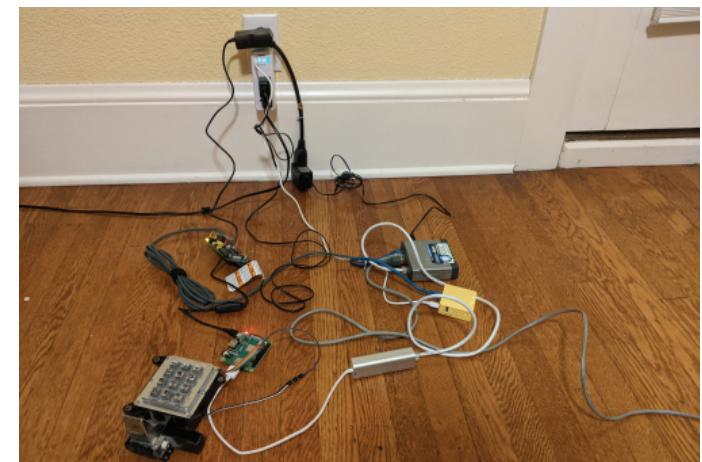
# 2021 Year in Review

We continued to hold fast through the attrition of a heartless world as well as the insults of enemy action. That's something.

- One new phone deployed!
- The 100th revision of the telephony server was deployed, which means that the software that makes the phones run was updated 100 times over the years. Some of these changes were noticeable, and some were reliability upgrades.
- Futel engineers provided implementation support for the Felicific Calculus exhibit by Eric Kunsman.
- Wildcard Line episode 7 was released. Contribute to the Wildcard Line from any Futel phone.
- RACC awarded a Make|Learn|Build grant to Futel, which is supporting the development of new installation technologies.

Most importantly, we continued to provide services to our phones and incoming line. Usage for the year included:

- over 27,000 handset pickups
- over 10,900 outgoing calls
- over 7,400 calls received by the incoming line
- 698 calls to the Futel voice conference
- 117 attempts to communicate with the Druids of Sisyphus Gardens
- 105 calls to a randomly selected American concentration camp
- 96 calls to the Payphone Demultiplexer
- 87 calls to the mayor of Portland
- 54 calls to the Willamette Valley Dream Survey
- 51 calls to the mayor of Detroit
- 18 contributions to the Wildcard Line
- 10 calls to the mayor of Ypsilanti



11