

Party Line

the signal lives in darkness

Issue 5, Spring 2020
2019 Review Edition



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Labor

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Contributors

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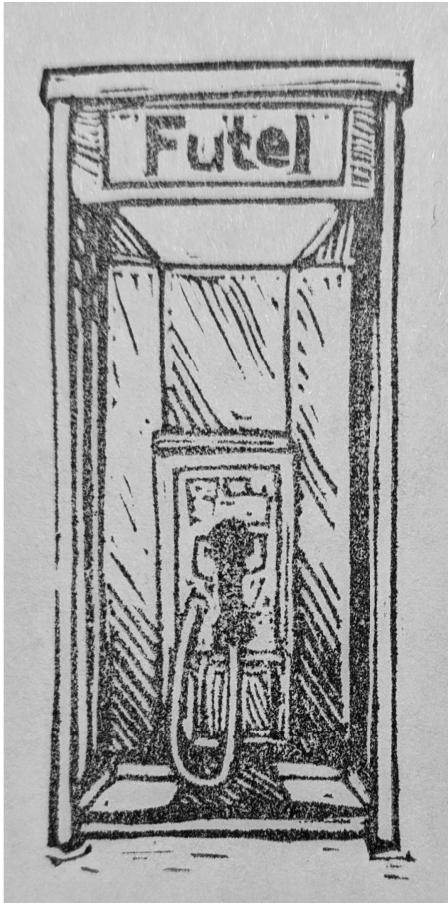
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Image Credits

Back Cover: Sam Bunn; Inside Front Cover: Cabel Sasser; pg. 4 Map: Mathew Lippincott; pg. 6 2019 In Review: Fiona Bearclaw, ascii art J. Plumb; pg 11 Projects Supported: Patricia Vásquez (top) and Vanessa Renwick (bottom); pg. 12 Five Years of Futel: Illustration Debbie Wager & Photo Cabel Sasser; Sisyphus Log: Photos PEST & Illustration Fiona Bearclaw (pg. 19); Pg. 22 Support: Fiona Bearclaw.

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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, or see our website at <http://futel.net>. Thanks to everyone who has supported Futel!

In Defense of the Landline

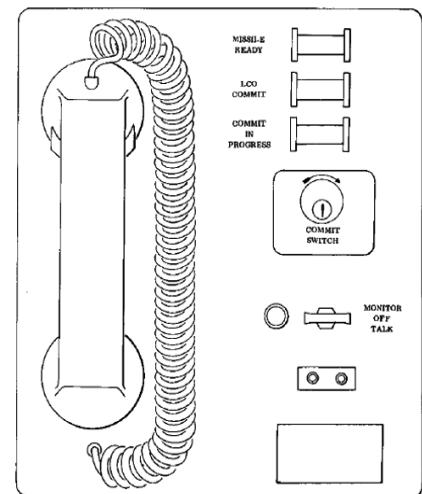
One of the motivations behind Futel is to produce useful items out of artificially worthless detritus that was once valuable. We hope to produce a small effort in reversing the fake entropy of industrial life by intercepting complex manufactured objects before they hit the landfill or the recycler at the end of their intended lifecycle, combining them with other junk, turning them into something new, and putting them back in people's faces.

The apparent prosperity of today relies on a mountain of kipple which we are supposed to ignore, and we need to make that visible again. And it's just fun to use trash. What feelings should be engendered by from the art and gadgets and shiny stuff that we first world residents get to play with? Should we be glad that they were manufactured and shipped here so we could enjoy them for a week and then discard them? Will our grandchildren get to drink the heavy metals that leach from them in the landfill? Will they fashion crude spears and talismans from them?

Well, great, we find fulfillment in what we are doing, but more importantly, any worthwhile public project is going to need to relate to those who will experience it. Our installations are made to be put on the street and used by whoever is walking down the sidewalk. They will only be successful if the people in the neighborhood want to use them. We could be installing sculptures made from recycled materials, uplifting geegaws to inspire and distract the people. Instead we created a phone

company.

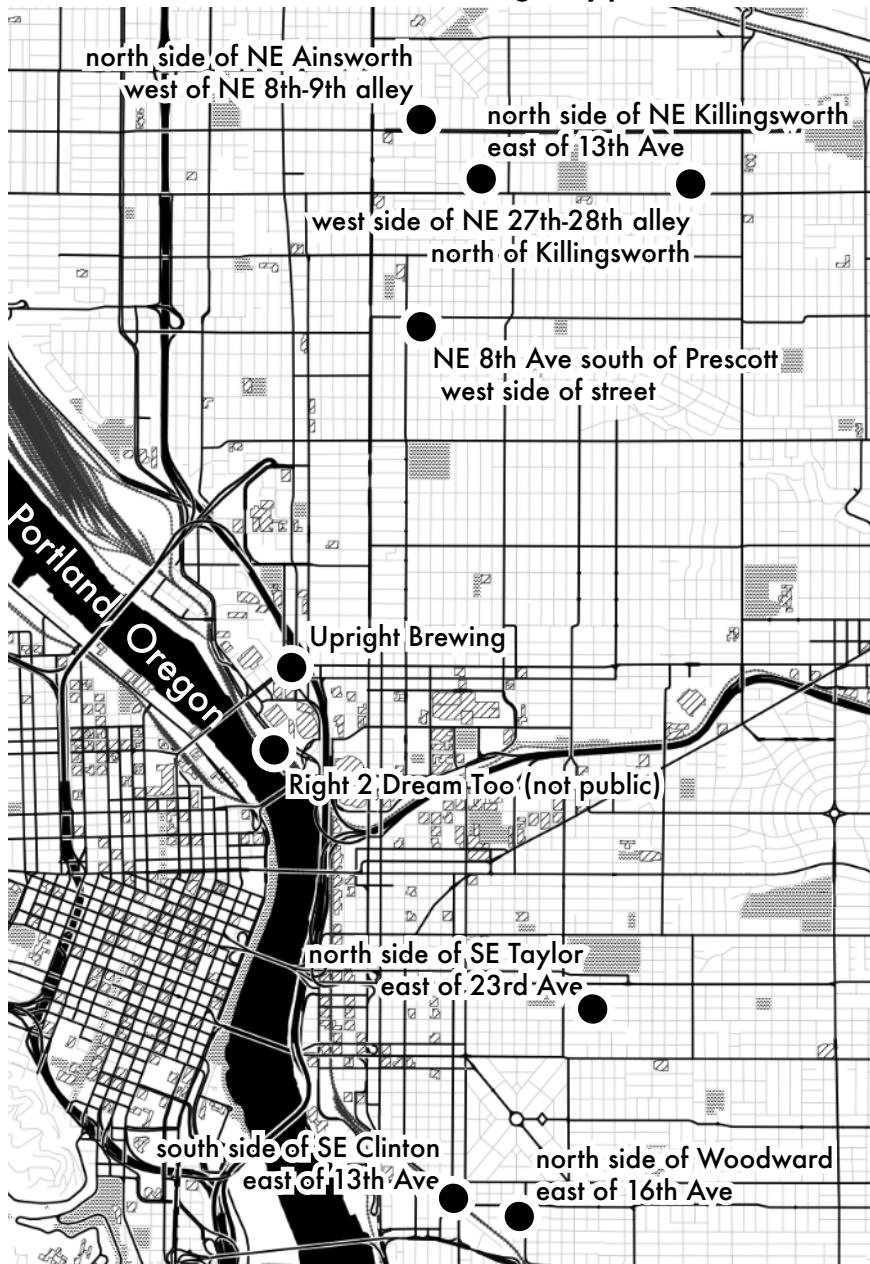
It is good that we have convinced ourselves that we are doing well, or at least are good at what we are doing. This must be the part where we are patting ourselves on the back while making oblique comments about the mote in the eye of some artist not clever enough to use a telecommunications network as their medium. Damming rivers to power the word processors



for our self-congratulatory essays. This city is so fucked, this whole world is so fucked these days, that any project needs to consider whether it's a worthwhile way for its participants to spend their remaining time. We don't really know whether we're doing the right thing by installing free payphones, maybe we should turn them into barricades or battering rams or something instead. Until then, please enjoy and utilize our phones, and call your mom!

Futel Service Map

The Americas' Fastest-Growing Payphone Network



Service Map as of December 31, 2019

created with OpenStreetMap & Stamen's Toner tileset CC-BY-SA

Death of the Payphone



When the dead payphone and pedestal in front of the convenience store were missing, I asked the clerk if he knew who the provider was, because it is not common for them to remove decrepit phones anymore. He said that two guys had sawed the bolts and carted it off on a bicycle. "The store was open but the clerk wasn't about to stop them".



I can't hear you! I'm using a scrambler!



This was my favorite payphone location, next to the bike racks at OMSI, because I enjoyed sitting where this photo was taken, on a bench across the plaza, and watching people as I prank called them.

Church Extends a Helping Line to Phoneless

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 1984

PORTRLAND, Ore., Sept. 1 (UPI) — Rising telephone bills forced so many people in the neighborhood to give up their phones that the Mallory Avenue Christian Church has installed a free community phone.

"We got the idea from the steady stream of people coming by and asking to use the phone to make local calls," Vi Miller, secretary of the inner-city church, said today. "They wanted to call their doctors, or schools, reasonable things that people need to use the phone for."

The phone, which has been placed in the front of the church, is available for local calls only for anyone who needs it. A volunteer worker limits the length of the calls. The church also takes messages, a service used mainly by job hunters, the secretary said.

In the first week it was available, about a dozen people a day used the phone, but the church expects the numbers to increase as word spreads.

Unable to Afford Phones

The Rev. Douglas Wirt said some parishioners in the low-income neighborhood were unable to afford phones before the breakup of the Bell system but that quite a few others recently gave up their phones.

"The trend seems to be to price low-income users out of the market and the phone has become a necessity of urban life," he said. "If people can't have one in their home, there needs to be this. Even in our own neighborhood, we may need another phone to fill the demand."

Besides the 125-member Mallory Avenue church, other members of the Ecumenical Parish of Northeast Portland are chipping in to pay for the phone, including the Patton Central Church and the United Methodist Church. The Northeast Portland Y.W.C.A. is also sponsoring the effort.

"We tried to get some help from local Bell office," Mr. Wirt said. "Their public relations office was interested at

first. But as they explored, the implications became clear and they backed off."

Ron Allen, a spokesman for Pacific Northwest Bell disagreed.

"We're not seeing any tremendous drop off because of the rate increase," he said. "No big wave of disconnects."

Rise in Phone Rates

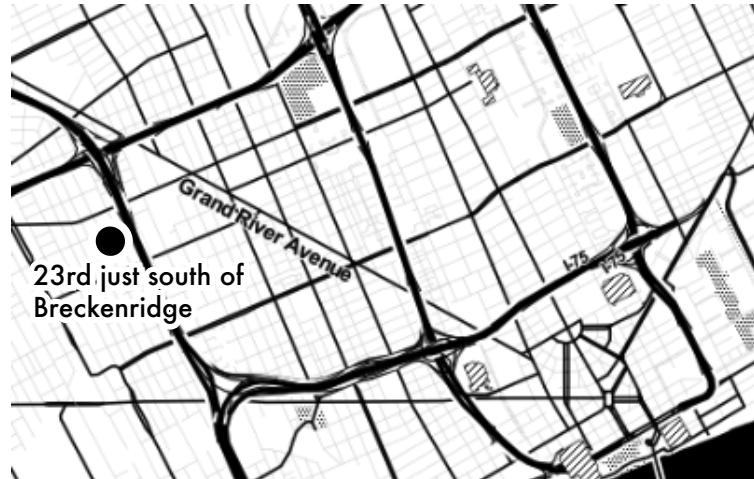
As a result of rate increases, Portland's basic measured residential phone service now costs \$8.90 a month, as against \$7.90 in November 1983, with \$3 of free local calls. Budget measured service, in which there are no free calls, has gone to \$6.90 from \$5.90, and flat-rate phone service, where users can make as many calls as they want, is \$15.88, up from \$13.30 last year.

Customers must also now pay an additional \$2-a-month charge for access to local service. A similar charge for a hookup to long-distance lines has been delayed until mid-1985.

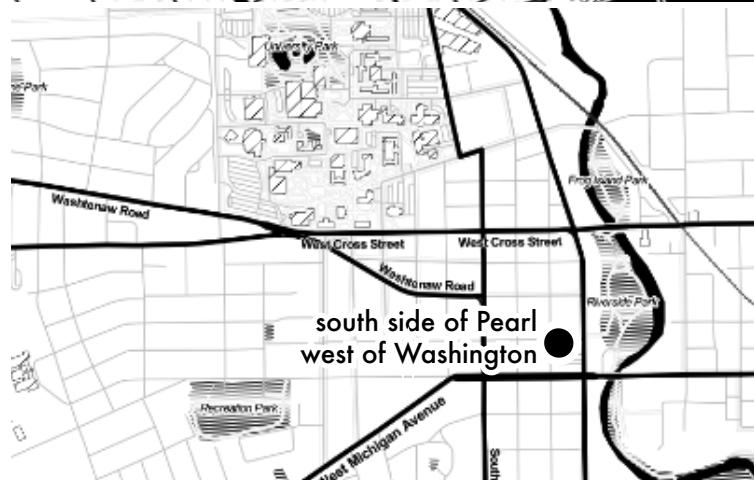
The rate increases are among millions of dollars of increases that local phone companies have received since the breakup of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company into separate units.

Representative Ron Wyden, Democrat of Oregon, a member of the House Telecommunications Subcommittee who is investigating the effects of the breakup, said the free community telephone at the church was believed to be the first one in the country. He added that it could start a trend.

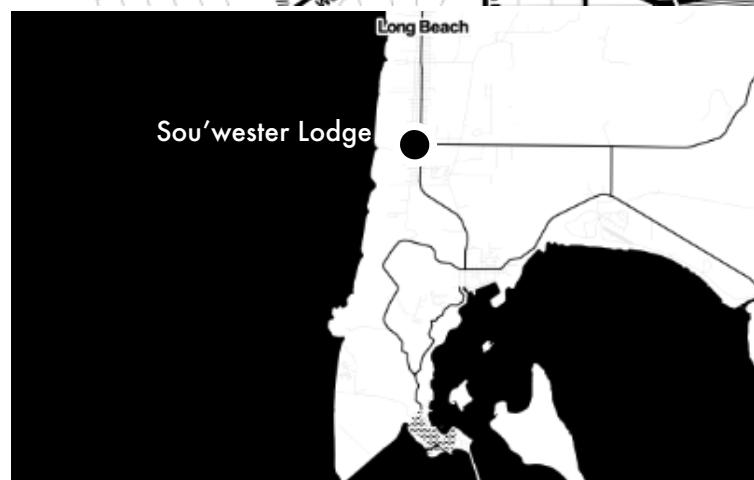
Detroit



Ypsilanti



Long Beach, WA

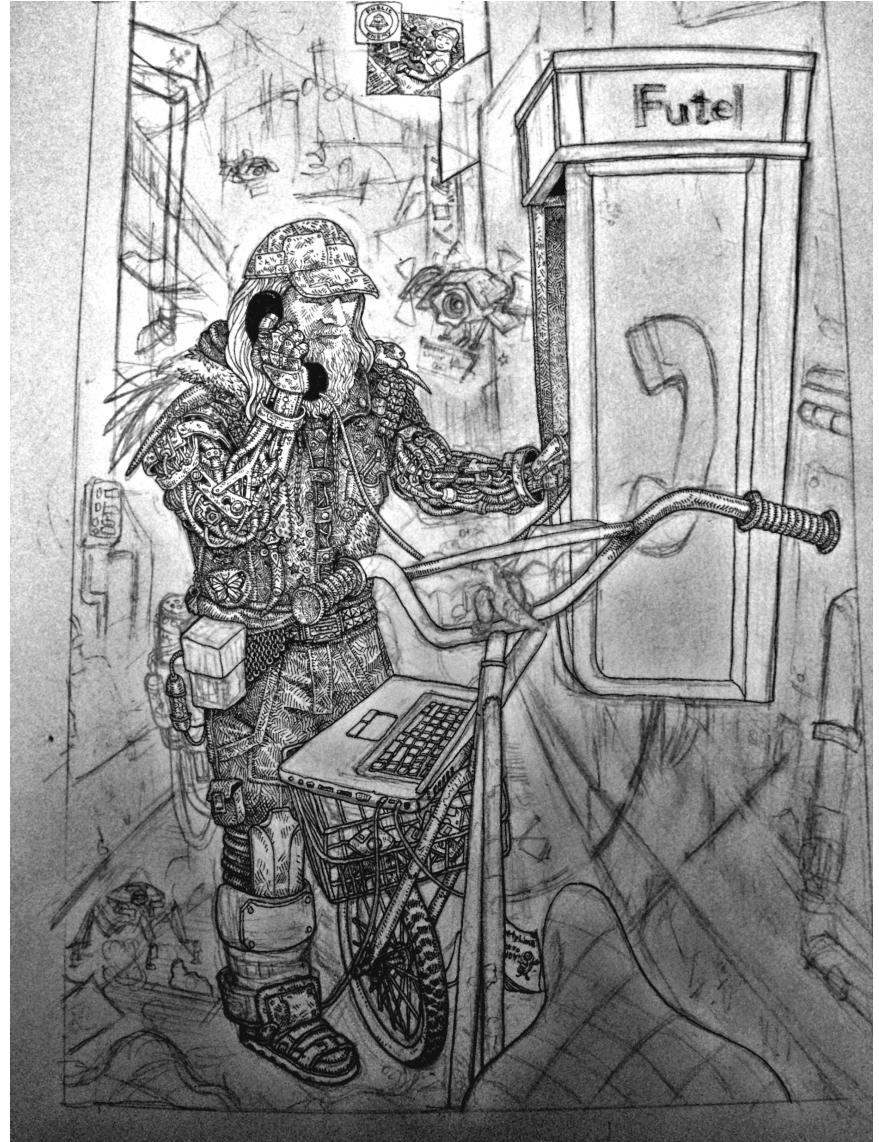
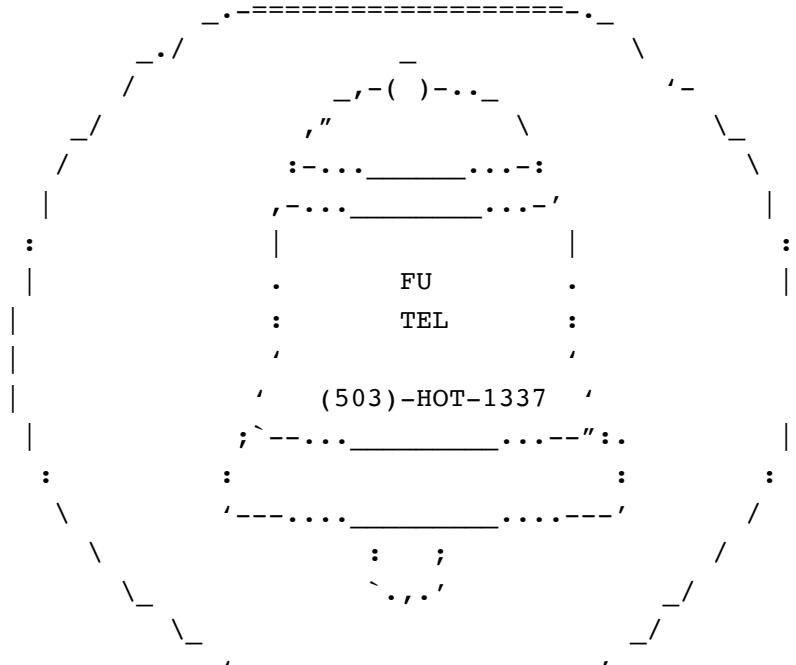


2019 Year in Review

2019 was, of course, a banner year for Futel operations!

- Three new phones were installed. Most notable was the first Detroit phone on Breckenridge St! Other locations were the parking lot of the Sou'wester Lodge in Seaview WA, and back in Portland on NE 8th Ave and at the bar of Upright Brewing, why not. This brings our inventory to ten public phones, plus the semipublic ones at the Upright and Right To Dream Too!

- We provided installation support for interactive shows by the Black Life Experiential Research Group, Patricia Vázquez, and the Hello Voyager project at Open Signal Fest.
- Funding was secured from the Regional Arts and Culture Council, a hefty individual donation, and of course from various people who support us on Patreon or allow themselves to be charmed into pressing small bills into our hands. Thanks!



Druid of Sisyphus Gardens Documented Voicemail

unknown date

Um, hiii. Is this the burrito place? I really wanted a burrito today. Sooo, if you're not the burrito place, just don't call back. But if you are the burrito place, I would love some burritos. Yeah, yeah, yeah burritos! Buh-buh-buh burritos! Yeah, yeah, yeah, burritos!

Have a spectacular day!

2019 (children, abbreviated)

"I'm Banana 1, and my friend is Banana 2. Can you call back right away so we can talk about bananas? Here is is Banana 2!"

"My name is Banana 2 but I like playing Banana 1"

2019 Fall

"Do you have any rocks? Like really big rocks? I'm the man to push them."

2019-8-28

Voice 1: "Hi, I hope you have a good day!"

Voice 2: "Tell us the secret of Stonehenge, did aliens land there? Did aliens build it? Are you an alien?"

Voice 1: "I would also like to know that, but first and foremost, I hope you have a really good day!"

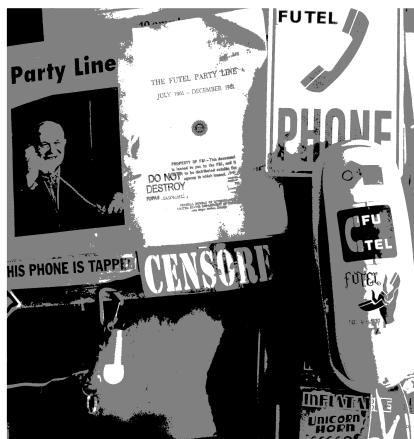
Voice 2: "What if I'm an alien?"

Voice 1: "I think you might be."

Voice 3: "I hope your day is like really good, but like not so good that you can't match it later in life."

Voice 1: "Truer words have never been spoken. Thank you!"

Thank You FUTEL, Pest and Verm, the Druids of Sisyphus



Wildcard Line from any Futel phone.

- Party Line #4 was published. Find back issues of Party Line at Microcosm Publishing.

Most importantly, we continued to provide services to our phones and incoming line, including:

- 11312 outgoing calls placed
- 376 calls to a randomly selected American concentration camp
- 326 calls to the Futel voice conference
- 142 Longmont Potion Castle experiences
- 92 uses of the Payphone Demultiplexer
- 88 attempts to communicate with the Druid of Sisyphus Gardens
- 84 voicemail boxes created
- 76 calls to the mayor of Portland
- 16 calls to the mayor of Ypsilanti



New Phones

First public Futel phone in Detroit! 23rd just S of Breckenridge St! Installed with support from Nelson.



It's bar phone but it's all ages, so call your mom! Upright Brewing on N Broadway.



NE 8th Ave S of NE Prescott.



Parking lot of the Sou'Wester Lodge in Seaview, Washington, installed with support from the Sou'Wester Lodge and Spaceness.



Sisyphus Log

Druid of Sisyphus Gardens Call Log
Highlights Since Recorded Times

2018-11-25

Caller asked if this was the escort service of Pasadena, CA. "No, sorry". Caller hung up before I could provide them with any more information.

2018-12-21

Caller asked what else they could do on a Futel. I provided them with some information. "Chill."

2019-4-23

Caller asked if I was the Druid of Sisyphus. "No. No, wait, yes. Are you looking for a specific Druid?" "Yes", they said. I answered their questions.

2019 spring

Caller apologized when I let them know they can call anyone else for free. I didn't mean it that way.

2019 summer

Callers were a couple walking in their new neighborhood. They were excited about Futel, and I explained some of Futel's telephony services. I told them I was a Druid-in-training. "So you work for the telephone company?" "No."

2019 fall

Caller explained they found a pay-



phone, so they tried calling their cellphone. I told them that they hadn't miscalled, and told them how to call their cellphone from the payphone. They thanked me, and told me that I sound like a really kind person, and that they hoped it wasn't too late where ever I was. I thanked them and told them to have a good night. Caller hung up, then I realized I neglected to tell them that dialing a Druid was a good way to test the interactive-ness of a phone booth at midnight.

2020 January

Caller asked what plants I grow. I provided them with information. Caller repeated information, then hung up.

damage.



2019-10-25

Caller asked how my night was going. I replied that it was going well, thank you, and hung up.

2019-11-15

Caller asked whether the concentration camp directory entry was real, this is an art project, right? I told them it was.

2019-10-08

Caller asked for the number of a personal injury lawyer. We picked one out together from Yelp reviews.

2019-10-22

Caller asked how to make a call to a non-503 area code. I told them to hang up and dial 1 for a dial tone.



New Feature: Carlos the Rollerblader

available on all Futel Phones!

For a well appreciated but all too short period in 2019, access to famed advice provider Carlos The Rollerblader was provided by all Futel phones in Portland during their posted office hours of 4 to 8 PM. Thanks to Carlos and all who called in!



New Feature: Call a Concentration Camp in the United States



Now available from all Futel phones is our newest feature: call a concentration camp! Select this option from the directory to be connected to a randomly selected concentration camp in the continental United States of America!

"I like to ask them if they're aware of what happens to prison guards when human rights tribunals happen, and if they have a plan for that, when that day comes around."

He says he has also offered to sell them used children's toys at a discount.

- Detroit Metro Times

Because these concentration camps are fully operational, this is a valuable opportunity to learn about their functions, which include the detention, abuse, torture, and killing of human beings. As you may find yourself confined to one of these camps in the near future as their target populations are expanded, we recommend that you use this feature often.

*Image Credit: North Carolina Department of Public Safety
Data: Concentration camp info supplied by 2600 Magazine*



© Horizontal Rain/YouTube

operates the insinkerator. I asked him if they'd be ok being the managerator of my insinkerator and they said they'd accept the title gladly and said thank you, goodbye.

2019-07-28

Caller asked for some music recommendations cuz they were sick of the same ol stuff. I recommended the Slits. Conditioner. Wipers. Screamers. They then asked advice on how to stop watching too much tv. I told him to pretend to sit next to himself and watch himself as much as possible. They said that was the best idea yet and thanked me before they hung up.

2019-08-10

Caller asked if I'd ever walked in slo-motion out side. I said "nope" and they said they recommended it and I responded "ok" and then they said have a good day and I hung up.

2019-08-27

Caller told me their name and that they wanted to let me know that they were

going to Seattle to work on a project with another individual, but that they thought I already knew that.

2019-09-02

Caller hung up after my daughter answered.

2019-09-13

Caller asked me if I was sleeping, I replied that I was still asleep. Caller asked me to draw a Tarot card, I told them that they drew the 9 of disks and hung up.

2019-09-22

Caller asked how many Futel phones there were in Portland. I told them. "That is so awesome."

2019-10-06

Caller wanted the number for Uber customer service to make an accident report. I replied that I predicted that I would not be able to help, and was not able to find anything useful, but recommended that they call the police if there was an injury or property

2019-03-18

Caller was eventually able to request the number of a food stamp office near them, which I provided.

2019-03-19

Caller asked if this was the operator, I replied that it was. Caller asked if this was a REAL operator, I replied that it was and hung up.



2019-04-01

Caller asked if I could hear them, I responded that I could. Caller said several more things and hung up, but I couldn't understand them, possibly because of issues with the line. I called back but there was no answer.

2019-04-09

Caller may have been advising me that the microphone was distorted, and that the PAZ phone was experiencing call issues, but their voice was too distorted for me to understand.

2019-04-20



Call was all noise. I could not make out a voice at all. Lasted 32 seconds before I was disconnected.

2019-05-26

I heard nothing and advised the caller that I could not hear anything. Caller asked "how's it going?" I responded that it was going great and hung up.

2019-06-21

Caller asked for the number of an antique store.

2019-6-23

Said "hello" 3 times with no response. Called back and they asked how to call their father. I said hang up and press one. They said thanks.

2019-07-05

'The Girl from Ipanema' played. It was nice.

2019-07-21

Caller asked for food in walking distance cuz they are sick of looking at their phone and would rather talk to a human. I gave them a few choices and they didn't like them but said it was nice chatting.

2019-07-28

Caller asked if they could speak to my managerator. I asked my operator assistant if they could tell me what it was and hold him that the managerator

Projects Supported by Futel



Installation by Patricia Vázquez Gómez with support from Futel. At the Chehalim Cultural Center the Newberg Department of Friendship Project installed a station for folks in Newberg to answer the questions we gathered from Mexicans living in Newberg.



In HERE || Humboldt, Lisa K. Bates and Sharita Towne, also known as the Black Life Experiential Research Group (BLERG), present research-based art and activism from the past year as Artists-in-Residence for the Humboldt neighborhood. This work centers Black life of the past, present and future as integral to the community's fabric. Paragon Arts Gallery at PCC Cascade.

Five Years of Futel

Five years ago, Futel established its first lodgement upon the public space by deploying a single pay-phone with no identifying information attached to it. Eventually one person picked up the handset, and then another, and another. We confused many people while a group of dedicated users and occasional experimenters grew around us. Now we have expanded to ten public phones and two more at a houseless rest area and a bar.

We provide over twelve thousand outgoing calls a year and many other encounters with our services, interactions, and operators. They laughed at us at the beginning, but who's laughing now? The same people, mostly. But more importantly, many people have laughed and cried into our phones, and also asked questions, made demands, expressed themselves, and rambled on confusingly. We hope to continue fielding calls far into the future.



2019 Operator Log Excerpts



Seven operators logged over 40 operator calls in 2019, and, as always, there have been moments of passion, confusion, levity, urgency, banality, and sorrow. Here is a sample of logged calls, with some sensitive and many less interesting examples removed.

2019-01-07

Caller asked if the phone could be used for long distance calls, I replied that it could.

2019-01-15

Caller told me they were inquiring about calling in North America with a Canadian calling card and "looking for knowledge on this." I began to tell them they should be able to call for free, and was interrupted with "Thank you for your wisdom" and a hangup.

2019-01-27

Caller wanted the number of a laundromat.

2019-01-28

Caller wanted locations for Futel phones in NE Portland.



2019-02-01

Caller wanted to make a collect call, I told them how to call for free.

2019-02-02

Caller asked "if this was a real pay-phone". I replied yes and disconnected.

2019-02-20

Buzzing noise.

2019-03-18

Caller requested the number of an individual, which I was unable to provide.