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Local residents trying to reach relatives in Chile

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Two days after a devastating earthquake hit Chile, Springfield resident Carrie Martinez is still trying to track down friends and relatives.

Martinez, who grew up in Chatham, spent about seven years in Chile between 1999 and 2007. Her ex-husband, Luis, is safe in Santiago, but there are still some people she hasn't heard from.

"It's frustrating," Martinez said. "Every time I call over there, there's no line available. The only way I can get through is calling a home phone or business phone. If you call a cell phone, the call will not go through."

Saturday's 8.8 magnitude quake was centered in the town of Concepcion, about 270 miles from Santiago. Like several people in the Springfield area, Martinez says communication has been hit-and-miss.

Martinez said the initial contact with her ex-husband was through Facebook. She was able to get a message to friends in Argentina, who managed to get through on Luis' cell phone. Later, Luis called his family in Chatham.

"He explained that there was a boat at the port that got thrown all the way up (on the beach). There were several houses along the water that were also destroyed," Martinez said.

Veronica Espina, a professor at UIS who grew up in Chile, also has ties to Santiago.

"I would say 90 percent of my family lives in Santiago. If it wasn't for Facebook, I would be panicking," Espina said. "I've heard from sisters, cousins and aunts, my family is well."

Espina also has a few family members in Concepcion.

"I was really worried about them, but then I remembered that in February, people leave the city to vacation. They were someplace else, so they are OK," Espina said.

Espina said some buildings in Santiago were damaged by the quake, and an unknown number of smaller villages were heavily damaged. Buildings in those communities were of traditional adobe construction, and many collapsed when the quake hit.

"(Friends and family members) heard that a couple of towns known for their crafts and artisan markets are completely gone. They don't exist anymore because of the adobe construction. That's pretty horrible."

Yarela Beltran-Osgood returned in January from a month-long visit to several cities in Chile.

Beltran-Osgood was born in Chile in 1977 and grew up in Concepcion.

She attended Springfield High School for two years as a foreign exchange student and graduated in 1996. During that time, she met the man who would become her husband, Stephen Osgood.

"We have been communicating the best we can with family and friends through Facebook," she said. "Cell phones and land lines are down, and the internet is intermittent. We'll be talking one minute through Facebook, and the next minute they are gone."

Beltran-Osgood said she still hasn't heard from many of her friends who live in the Concepción area.

"We do not know a whole lot of details of how the damage has affected our family and friends," she said. "My parents still own a house in Concepción and we are unsure the condition of the house. Two of my cousins live in multi-story apartment buildings in Santiago, the capital. Their buildings have cracks in the walls."

John Reynolds can be reached at 788-1524. Rhys Saunders can be reached at 788-1521.

Area couple arrived in Chile only hours before quake

Springfield native Doug Closter and his wife, Noemi, arrived in Santiago, Chile, less than 12 hours before Saturday's devastating earthquake.

The couple had boarded a bus to Vina del Mar, north of the quake's epicenter near the city of Concepcion, before the disaster struck, said Closter's mother, Kay Closter of Springfield.

"They were awakened by things falling off the walls and vases were breaking," Kay Closter said. "Most of the damage where they were consisted of cracked walls and broken glass."

Perhaps even more fortunate is the fact that Doug Closter, 27, is no stranger to crisis situations.

The 2001 Pleasant Plains High School graduate served three tours of duty in Iraq with the U.S. Marine Corps.

"He is taking it in stride," Kay Closter said. "He's probably thinking, 'I've been in much worse situations than this.'"

Closter says communication with her son has been limited, but, most importantly, she knows he and Noemi are OK.

Doug Closter was to start school next week in Vina del Mar as part of the international business studies program at San Diego State University.

Kay Closter found out about the earthquake about 4 a.m. Saturday, after her sister saw it on the news.

"We felt very helpless. You don't know what to do. We didn't know exactly where he was, we just knew he was in Chile," Kay Closter said.

The family heard from Doug and Noemi via email about 10 a.m. Saturday.

"The apartment where they are has very limited water. (On Saturday) there was no food and water, but they had power and gas," Kay Closter said.

Though she's accustomed to the worry that accompanies military deployments, Kay Closter said natural disasters are a different fear all together.

"Even though you breath a sigh of relief when hear from them, you don't know what the aftershocks are going to bring," she said.

"That's still something that's out of your control, so you just have to trust them and trust God and trust their instincts.

"He always seems to pull through."

Want to help?

The Salvation Army has established an easy way for people to donate money to help the earthquake victims in Chile.

People who want to help can send a \$10 donation by texting the word "CHILE" to 52000 via a mobile phone. The donation will appear as a charge on their phone bill.

The Salvation Army has had a presence in Chile since 1909. It offers social and services including hospitals, schools for impoverished children, and adult rehabilitation.

Verizon Wireless also has waived all calling fees for customers trying to reach loved ones in Chile. Additionally, the company is working with international relief organizations to allow people to donate money through their cellular phones.

To make a \$10 donation to Habitat for Humanity, text the word "CHILE" to 25383; to make a \$10 donation to World Vision, text the word "CHILE" to 20222.

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