

Powerful quake causes anxious times for some Austin residents

By [Nancy Flores](#) and [Perla Arellano](#) - American-Statesman Staff



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Alejandra Melo Pale said she experienced the longest hour of her life after the 7.1 magnitude earthquake struck central Mexico on Tuesday and the Austinite had no news about her father's whereabouts. Melo Pale, who survived Mexico's 1985 earthquake that left more than 10,000 dead, was left helpless waiting by the phone to hear back from her family in Mexico City.

She soon learned that although her father was safe, her 8-year-old nephew, Leonardo Farias Quintero, was among the children trapped in the Enrique Rebsamen elementary school, where at least 24 people have been reported dead, 21 of them children. It wasn't until after 9:30 p.m. Tuesday that she heard her nephew had made it out alive but was in the hospital in critical condition.

"I still can't believe it," she said. "It's difficult to accept these things."

News of the earthquake's devastation has left other Austinites in shock as well. For years, Mexic-Arte Museum Executive Director Sylvia Orozco has led annual Mexico City art tours for Austinites. The latest nine-person tour returned from the Mexican capital Sunday after spending Mexico's Independence Day holiday there and touring about 20 of its world-class museums.

According to ArtNet News, many museums and archaeological sites have been closed as a safety precaution. Mexico City's prominent Palace of Fine Arts, which was among Orozco's stops on the tour, tweeted that a thorough inspection of all its exhibits was underway. The National Museum of Art had minor damage to the building's facade.

"I feel very sad for Mexico because they are a part of us," Orozco said. While there, she watched the Mexican military participate in the national Independence Day parade. A couple of days later, she watched on television as soldiers helped earthquake victims in need.

The Mexic-Arte Museum, at 419 Congress Ave., will be accepting donations of medical equipment such as disposable gloves and gauze, nonperishable food and tools such as hammers and helmets through Sunday. Sara Palma, a graphic designer at the museum, felt compelled to organize local relief efforts after spending this week worried about her Mexico City-based family and her hometown.

Palma, who moved to Austin a year ago, said she never felt so desperate as she did Tuesday when she couldn't get in touch with her mother and little brother back home.

"I kept watching the news, photos and my Facebook" feed, Palma, 25, said. She finally reached her family using the communications app Whatsapp. From more than 900 miles away, Palma heard her mother Elizabeth Lara crying on the phone, but was relieved to know she was safe.



Palma and Lara have now teamed up to send donations dropped off at the museum to Mexico City, thanks to the support of the delivery services company Maasi Group, where Lara works.

Moved by the earthquake's devastation, Austin photographer Tania Bustillos, who is from Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, reached out to the museum about another way to help victims. From 3-6 p.m. Sunday, Bustillos and a group of photographers from Ideology Photography, the Photo Bus ATX, and Photography by Laceymarie will be making portraits for museum visitors. Monetary donations will go toward relief efforts.

"As humans we have no control over disasters like this," Orozco said. "But we can all help in all kinds of ways."

Here are some other ways Austinites can help:

- El Naranjo restaurant, 85 Rainey St., will host a benefit dinner Sept. 28 to raise money for relief efforts in Mexico. The three-course dinner is \$75. For more information or to RSVP, call 512-474-2776 or visit elnaranjorestaurant.com.
- [El Pueblo Viejo](#), 1906 E. Cesar Chavez St., is accepting relief supplies to take to Mexico.
- [El Interior](#) boutique, 1009 W Lynn St., is donating 50 percent of all sales on Saturday to earthquake relief in Oaxaca and Mexico City.
- Austin's Mexican Consulate is recommending that online donations be sent to the Mexican Red Cross at cruzrojadonaciones.org.