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In Puerto Vallarta, waiting for the big storm

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LARRY KEHLER

The beach was deserted as the storm steamed toward shore. Larry Kehler was hoping it would only sideswipe the pleasant resort town.

By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF OCTOBER 23, 2015

Normally, Larry Kehler and his wife, Cheryl, would be slicing pizzas and pouring beers for friends and

tourists in their restaurant a couple of blocks from the shores of the scenic resort town of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico.

“We’d just be running our bar and partying,” said Kehler, who goes by the moniker “Señor Fox.”

But with Hurricane Patricia, the strongest hurricane ever recorded in the Western Hemisphere, nearing shore Friday, life in paradise has taken a disturbing turn.

“We’re not doing anything today,” Kehler said in a telephone interview. “We’re just sitting here.”

He said local authorities had ordered all businesses, including his restaurant, Cafe Roma, to close down earlier in the day.

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Record-breaking Hurricane Patricia appeared to leave remarkably little damage as it moved rapidly inland over mountainous western Mexico.

10 strongest hurricanes ever

recorded in the Western Hemisphere

“The city’s going really crazy here, threatening to shut down power and water,” he said as sirens wailed in the background. “They’re running around town telling people to get out of harm’s way.”

But Kehler and his wife plan to stay put.

“Personally, I’m not worried at all,” he said. “If it turns and goes along the coast, we’re in big trouble here, but all of the forecasts have it hitting 100 miles south of us.”

He said he believed that if the storm followed its current projected path, the city would be largely protected by surrounding mountains and the bay.

Plus, the couple’s restaurant and their attached home are about 20 feet off the ground and a couple of blocks from the shore, he said.

Some people who own lower-level shops and homes were packing up valuables, boarding up, and placing sandbags around their property.

“I don’t see anyone panicking here,” he said.

Meanwhile, back in Boston, Jim Morrison, a residential real estate reporter for Banker & Tradesman who is friends with the Kehlers and about a dozen other people in Puerto Vallarta, was worried.

Morrison, 45, lived in Puerto Vallarta for two years to run a property rental company he co-owned there before moving back to the Boston area, where he grew up, to be with his wife.

“The effects could be worse than what are being predicted, so naturally, I’m concerned for my friends down there,” said Morrison.

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He said he was particularly worried that if the storm caused significant damage, it would take a toll on the economy of the tourism-dependent city, which right now is in the middle of the slow season for visitors.

“If the storm discourages vacationers and they can’t accommodate them for a while, that would be tough,” Morrison said. “Anything that affects tourism can be tough on them.”

But he said he was not surprised to hear Kehler’s description that the atmosphere there today was relaxed.

“It’s a very laid-back place,” said Morrison. “Because they are kind of protected [by the mountains and the bay] they don’t get hammered directly.”

Kehler, 64, a native of Canada who is a retired IT professional, said he and his wife, a retired nurse from Georgia, moved to Puerto Vallarta more than 10 years ago to enjoy its pleasant weather.

“Tired of cold winters,” he said.

Early Friday afternoon, he said the weather there was peaceful.

The calm before the storm, perhaps.

It was cloudy, but still bright outside. No wind to speak of, he said. Some earlier drizzle had dissipated and it was a little cooler than normal — in the high 70s instead of the 80s or 90s — but still a bit warm because of high humidity.

“It’s just a beautiful day here,” he said. Actually, he added, “We wish there was a little more wind so it would cool down.”

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