

**Wednesday, May 12, 2004**

**By DOUGLASS CROUSE  
STAFF WRITER**

**RIVERDALE - Firefighters battled rooftop flames under rumbling, flickering skies Tuesday after a midnight lightning bolt ripped into the chimney and rafters of a Riverdale Parkway home.**

**Hours later, Rich and Christine Bland arrived home from a business trip to Chicago to find a scattering of red bricks in their driveway and a black hole where the ceiling in their second-floor hallway used to be.**

**The couple had cut their trip short after a police sergeant got in touch with them to deliver the news.**

**"How can you ever prepare for something like this?" Christine Bland asked, returning an embrace from next-door neighbor Mary Gambino.**

**Rich Bland, hockey director at Skylands Ice World in Hardyston, and his wife, who handles public relations at Seton Hall Law School, married in July and began creating a home together in the two-story colonial.**

**Among their belongings with water damage was Christine's wedding dress, although others appeared salvageable, they said.**

**Firefighters from three towns reached the blaze's core by climbing the ladder of a Pompton Lakes truck. Ascending directly from the ground during a lightning storm would be risky, Fire Chief Pat Cleary said.**

**Still, rain and lightning menaced from above. "It got pretty hairy there for a little while," Cleary said.**

**One neighbor described the crash of lightning that sparked the fire, and the smoky haze that filled the neighborhood for at least an hour afterward.**

**"It was this giant crack that rocked our house," Judy McCabe said.**