

# Lightning strikes

## Powerful jolts hit Scotts Valley

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SCOTTS VALLEY — Several people along Sims Road said they felt lucky to be alive Friday afternoon after a lightning storm struck in a concentrated area of the hillside community.

It blew out one family's television, exploded electrical boxes at a nursery and was felt by many who saw it strike in the Brook Knoll Elementary School parking lot.

Perhaps none were as affected as Rod Parsons. The experience was enough to alter his nickname from "Hot Rod" to "Lightning Rod," he predicted.

It happened shortly after 4 p.m. as the 38-year-old roofing contractor sat on a couch watching television near his napping 6-month-old son. Suddenly, he said a white flash of light hit the metal wood-burning stove, shot across the room to a metal picture frame and into the television.

As Parsons checked on his 87-year-old grandfather who lives next door, a second "flash and a bang" struck. Parsons ran to his house, where he noticed the smell of an electrical fire, and saw that the television was humming and had no picture.

Then he checked on his son, Nevada.

"The baby was lying here on the couch, his hair was standing on end and he looked like Einstein. He's

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fine, he's just crying a little," Parsons said.

"There are pieces of his hair that are still curly and stick out," Parsons' wife, Debbie, said later Friday night.

Debbie Parsons said she was glad she wasn't home when the lightning struck.

"I would have freaked out. When he called me at work, I thought he was joking."

The baby seemed fine Friday night, Debbie Parsons said, but said she would call a doctor today to be sure.

Rod Parsons said he believes his home at 58 Sims Road acted as a conductor because he keeps sheet metal in his shop on the ground floor. There are also several sheds topped with sheet metal on the property, the site of a former chicken ranch.

After the incident, Rod Parsons decided to go out for drinks.

"People at happy hour told me he's going to have ESP," Rod Parsons said.

Vernon Miller, who has lived on Sims Road for 64 years, said the electrical storm hit as suddenly as the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

"The flash was right here, it was close," Miller said. "Usually the storm comes off the ocean, bangs and goes right on by. But this was two strikes right after each other. It didn't scare me, though. I didn't have time to get scared."

The electric shock was also felt by people gathered at nearby Brook Knoll Elementary School, where students in an after-school program were safely inside. Fifth-grade teacher Breta Holgers said she saw the bolt hit the ground, and the jolt was enough to set off the school's fire alarm.

"We watched it hit, you could see it come down in the end of the parking lot," Holgers said. "People said

they could actually feel it in their body ... it was almost like a fluttering in your heart."

Holgers said the lightning even gave off a "chemical smell."

At Hope Nursery on Sims Road, behind Brook Knoll School, the electric current raced through Bruce Hope's greenhouse and caused at least \$1,000 damage.

Five electrical boxes that contained temperature controls, a timer and a telephone shattered into fragments that flew nearly 50 feet, and other parts were blackened and melted. A fax machine was burned inside, and underground pipes exploded, Hope said, so that "water was just shooting out of the ground."

Hope couldn't believe his timing Friday: he had just sent his employees home for the day because of the rain.

"Last week I missed the big slide (near the summit on Highway 17) by seconds," Hope said. Friday, the lightning strike "happened just behind me, I had just left the greenhouse. Now I'm waiting for the third."

A brief, heavy downpour also dumped an inch or so of rain across the county. Although more rain is in store for the Monterey Bay area, an encore of Friday's storm is not expected.

Today should be partly cloudy, according to the National Weather Service, with highs in the upper 50s and lows in the 40s. Clouds are expected to increase tonight, with a 20 percent chance of rain. It will be mostly cloudy Sunday, with rain likely in the afternoon.

Weather officials predict another storm will follow, although the front doesn't seem as powerful as earlier storms. Northern California will probably get the most direct hit, officials said.

Sporadic rain and cloudiness are expected Monday through Wednesday, with lows in the uppers 30s and highs in the 50s.