

Fire-hit family home for Christmas

Near East Siders' home damaged in blaze started at neighboring rental

By **Jessie Balmert**
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

A few hours after a fire tore through Tiara Bryant's home right before Thanksgiving, her landlord made her a promise: "You'll be home for Christmas."

"Well, I think it was more like, 'We'll try to get it done by Christmas,'" said Bill Brett, director of asset management for the Columbus Housing Partnership. "But she had selective hearing."

Nine weeks later, Brett made good on his promise. Bryant, her husband and their four kids stepped into 536 Kimball Place yesterday. The two-story Near East Side house had been fully repaired and even featured an artificial Christmas tree.

Bryant compared the experience to a home-makeover program. "It's like I've got my own show," she said.

The remodel, which normally should have taken about five months, was finished in five weeks, with contractors working around the clock. Bryant watched the work from her van.

"We're just happy being involved," said Joey Thomas, marketing director for George Thomas Contractors Inc. of Hilliard, which was hired shortly after the fire. The family-owned company bought the family a Christmas tree and filled their new refrigerator with food.

Bryant, 33; her husband, Anthony Stowe, 34; and their children — which now number four, ages 4 to 15 — have lived at the house for 10 years. In three more years, they'll be eligible to buy it at a reduced price from the housing partnership.

Bryant said the family is ready to leave her mother's house, where they have lived since the fire, and their chil-



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"It's like I've got my own show."

TIARA BRYANT

comparing her experience to that of a home-makeover TV program winner

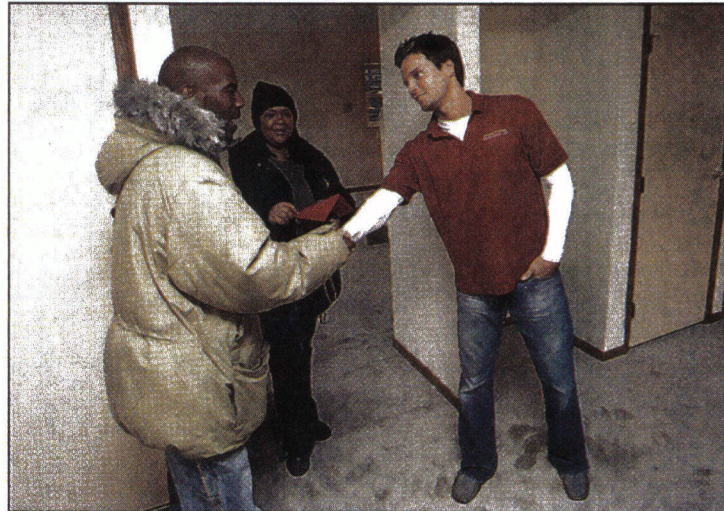
dren are excited to have a home for Christmas. But memories of the fire still trouble her.

"I'll be afraid to sleep, afraid to wake up and find the house on fire," she said.

The fire began in the morning of Oct. 24 when someone lit a mattress at the neighboring rental property, which had been vacant since March. No one has been charged in the blaze, which the Columbus Fire Division ruled was arson.

Flames leaped the short distance between the houses.

Bryant and Stowe had fallen asleep watching television in the downstairs living room



ABOVE: Tiara Bryant and her husband, Anthony Stowe, are grateful to be back so soon in their rebuilt house after an arson fire spread. Columbus Housing Partnership and others got the work done in just five weeks.

LEFT: Joey Thomas of George Thomas Contractors Inc. of Hilliard greets Stowe and Bryant.

when she saw something through the window.

"I noticed the glowing and at once, it clicked," said Bryant. They spent the next frantic minutes looking for their four children and salvaging as much furniture as

possible.

They watched from the street as the fire destroyed two bedrooms. The housing partnership's insurance paid for the repairs, which cost about \$60,000.

But after weeks of work, the

couple is home in time for the holidays.

"It's been amazing," Bryant said. "People were beating down the door to offer help. I want to thank everybody for their support in this time."

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