



At home: Heart patient Mindy Brass (right) will be staying at the home of Robin and Kenneth Fraser-Barrett while she awaits a drug trial on new charges. Oakland Circuit Judge Rudy Nichols placed Brass under house arrest at the Farmington Hills home.

Brass thanks 'wonderful people'

A California woman whose first trip to Michigan came as a suspect facing life in prison is changing her opinion of state residents.

"I've never met so many wonderful people," former prison inmate Mindy Brass said after spending the weekend at the Farmington Hills home of Robin and Fred Fraser-Barrett.

She was referring to people who stopped by or telephoned to congratulate Brass or offer support and encouragement. "It's a real privilege to know these people," said the 39-year-old woman, who was released on bond Friday pending a new trial.

"Everybody's happy about getting to know Mindy," said Fraser-Barrett, who like her husband is retired from Ameritech.

Brass is on an electronic tether and is formally under house arrest at the home of the Fraser-Barrett family. But it's a very comfortable house arrest, she acknowledged. On Saturday, she went to services at Congregation Beth Shalom in Oak Park.

On Monday, she went to the University of Michigan Medical Center where she is being evaluated for possible heart transplant.

Both trips away from the Fraser-Barrett home were authorized under the conditions of her personal bond that allow Brass to leave to worship or to seek medical attention.

"We (also) had a barbecue Saturday, because Mindy is crazy about ribs and my husband makes the best," Robin Fraser-Barrett said.

In the near future, Brass expects to see her teenage daughter Erika, who was put in foster care facilities in California after her mother's arrest. When Erika comes to Michigan to see her mother — as she has on several occasions — she is in the legal custody of Vicki and Sam Cross of Beverly Hills.

County judge's ruling on inmate's release saves taxpayers' money

When Oakland Circuit Judge Rudy Nichols released Mindy Brass to the custody of a Farmington Hills family last week, he saved Oakland taxpayers a ton of money.

Brass, a heart patient who seeks a transplant, was housed at the North Oakland Medical Center — where the tab ran between \$250 to \$1,200 per day, not including the two armed guards on a 24-hour basis. She is now under house arrest at the home of Robin and Kenneth Fraser-Barrett. The 39-year-old California woman is receiving a new trial on a previous conviction under Michigan's drug-lifer law.

Saving money was not necessarily the judge's primary concern. First, Nichols was obligated to assure that Brass was no threat to society. Second, the judge had to make sure that Brass would appear for court dates, including her new trial in November.

Other concerns were, for the most part, academic under the legal considerations for setting bond.

Releasing Brass on bond represents a savings to taxpayers, said Dale Cunningham, business manager for the Oak-

land County Sheriff's Department. "We don't like to talk about medical expenses (for inmates) because people get upset," he said. "But she was expensive."

Brass was housed at NOMC for most of the week leading up to Friday's bond hearing in circuit court. She was sent there by the Oakland County Sheriff's Department after Brass was released from the Michigan Department of Corrections to the county jail pending her bond hearing before Nichols.

The county jail doesn't have the medical facilities that would be needed to adequately care for a heart transplant patient, Undersheriff Henry Buffa said. Brass was sent the NOMC, because it has a heart unit.

The exact cost of Brass' hospital stay wasn't available. Furthermore, Cunningham said privacy considerations would likely preclude his disclosing the amount, if it was available.

Medical care for county jail inmates is provided under a contract with Michigan Blue Cross/Blue Shield under an administrative services contract, said Cunningham. Costs are always a concern, he said, the inmate's well being is also a con-

cern. "The typical hospital stay runs between \$250 and \$1,200 per day, depending on what is required."

But Brass, would presumably require special care, Cunningham said. Furthermore she would require two guards on an around-the-clock basis, he said.

Medical care for Brass has been a high priority item since April, 1994, when she suffered a severe heart attack at Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth, where she had been an inmate since being implicated in a 1991 drug bust in Troy.

Since the heart attack, Brass has had numerous repeat seizures requiring that she be transported to the University of Michigan Medical Center on an emergency basis, often for days at a time.

Matt Davis, a spokesman for the Michigan Department of Corrections, said prison records are not broken down to determine the specific costs for a particular inmate.

But once somebody convicted of a crime becomes an inmate, the state has an ethical and financial responsibility to provide medical care, he said. "Even if it's special care off site," he said.

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