

Family makes room for former inmate

On her first evening beyond the confines of prison in almost eight years, Mindy Brass was to be surrounded by friends.

"We're planning a quiet evening, but it's going to be quite a celebration," said Robin Fraser-Barrett, who welcomed Brass into her home in Farmington Hills.

"Brass, 39, is a California woman who — until last month when Oakland Circuit Judge Rudy J. Nichols granted a new trial — was in prison under Michigan's controversial drug life law that mandates life in prison, with no chance of parole, for anyone convicted of trafficking in 650 or more grams of cocaine or heroin.

"She was released on personal bond Friday after defense attorney Marguerite Hanes argued that a 1994 heart attack had left Brass in poor health and unable

to flee the state — a concern voiced by the Oakland County assistant prosecutor Beth Hand.

The defense motion was bolstered by an affidavit from a cardiologist at the University of Michigan, Dr. Keith Aaronson, who said Brass' continued incarceration would be hazardous to her health.

"We were concerned that she was a flight risk," said Dr. Hand, who evaluated Brass for a possible heart transplant — said keeping her in jail could hasten her death, said the assistant prosecutor.

Even with that testimony, Brass' release on personal bond had stringent conditions, Nichols said. Brass is to be under virtual house arrest — with an electronic tag at the home of the Fraser-Barrett family.

"(She) Brass is able to go to the doctor or to synagogue," said

Robin Fraser-Barrett, who agreed under oath to notify officials should terms of her release be compromised.

Fraser-Barrett said she did not know Brass until reading newspaper accounts about her incarceration and her need for a new heart last year. "I wrote to Mindy, and then I visited her. We sort of clicked, and now she's living in my home."

Robin and her husband Fred are both retired from Ameritech. They have four youngsters, including a 17-year-old daughter at home. "Our entire family is excited about having Mindy live with us," said Robin Fraser-Barrett.

Brass had never set foot in Michigan until she was arrested and brought to Troy where she had been implicated in a drug case. Two Californians attempted to sell a kilo of

cocaine to undercover police at the Holiday Inn in December, 1991.

The two men implicated Brass and two other men. Brass and two of the men were subsequently convicted under Michigan law, although one conviction was overturned on appeal.

Her new trial was ordered after Nichols said defense attorneys should have had access to a document that would enable them to challenge the credibility of William Leflet, one of the two men arrested in Troy.

Brass was serving her life term at Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth when she suffered a heart attack in April, 1994. Brass triggered an ethical debate on organ transplant procedures last year when she became the first inmate in Michigan history to request a heart transplant.

Expect delays and a possible detour for the next several days.

REPORTAGE TRAIL
At: Green Lake Road
Community: West Bloomfield
Details: The road is being widened to include a center turn lane through Aug. 24.

ROCHESTER ROAD
From: M-59 to Avon Road
Community: Rochester Hills
Details: One lane will be closed in each direction through July 31.

UNION LAKE
From: Wise to Cooley Lake
Community: Commerce Township
Details: Utility companies are conducting work that will affect the center turn lane for the next several days.

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OAKLAND DIGEST

Oakland Digest provides a summary of headline stories from around the county during the week leading up to July 19.

BIRMINGHAM
Museum piece: The Allen House, a Maple Road landmark for decades, could be converted into a museum. City officials gave the Birmingham Historical Society the go-ahead to develop a museum at the site, provided it raises \$300,000 toward the project.

BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP
Sidewalk talk: Township trustees are considering whether to ask voters to approve a new tax to build safety paths. The millage request could appear on the fall ballot.

CLARKSTON
Still in the game: It's been a good season for the Clarkston Tomcats senior softball team. The team, whose players range from early 60s to mid-70s, is 13-3 in its Oakland County senior softball league.

FARMINGTON HILLS
Parking problems: Despite protests from nearby residents, Farmington Hills council members approved Botsford Hospital's plans to expand parking onto property bordering St. Francis Street. Council members approved a zoning change for the property, 5-2, allowing parking lot plans to proceed.

LAKE ORION
Pool plans: Labor Day weekend has been tabbed as the opening date for Lake Orion High School's new pool. Newly-hired district aquatics director Amy Theyer said pool activities will be few at first, but will grow steadily throughout the year.

OXFORD
No Jack: For months, a sign on the vacant lumber yard on M-24 heralded the arrival of a Farmer Jack store. But that apparently won't happen as property owners and supermarket officials couldn't come to agreement on a lease.

ROCHESTER
Hall, Hamlin: City officials and residents expressed pleasure with the rebuilt Hamlin Road. The new Hamlin provides a major east-west thoroughfare north of M-69.

SOUTHFIELD
Road work: There is no dispute among Lathrup Village residents that the I-690/Southfield Road intersection is the worst in Oakland County. The heavily-traveled intersection earned that dubious distinction in a recent five-year survey of metro-area traffic accidents.

TROY
Founding father: Former Probate Judge Norman Barnard was remembered as a founding father of Troy, his hometown since 1919. Barnard, who died recently at 84, had served as a justice of the peace, as chairman of the Troy Charter Commission and as the community's first city manager.

WEST BLOOMFIELD
Public pool: The township parks and recreation commission announced plans to buy the Potomac Club, a private swim facility on Farmington road, north of Maple. The five-acre site includes a Z-shaped 75-foot swimming pool and 12,000-square foot clubhouse.

ROAD WATCH

Road improvements could cause delays on the following Oakland County Roads this week. Roads are open unless noted. Alternative routes are, advised in all instances.

14-986
From: Franklin to Inaker Community: Southfield
Details: Shoulders will be closed along westbound I-696 through Sept. 20.

14-986
From: Square Lake Road Community: Bloomfield Township and Troy
Details: The center turn lane and will be widened and the road will be resurfaced through Sept. 30.

14-986
From: Rattalee Lake Road to Davisburg Road
Community: Springfield Township
Details: A road paving project is being conducted through the end of August.

14-986
From: Big Beaver to Wattle Community: Troy

14-986
Details: Dequindre is being widened from two to five lanes. The project is expected to be completed by Oct. 31.

14-986
From: Welch to Haggerty Community: Commerce Township
Details: The road will be closed through Oct. 6.

14-986
At: Farmington Road Community: Farmington
Details: Grand River will be reduced to one lane in each direction through Sept. 15.

14-986
From: Palomouth to Grandy, east and west of Rochester Road Community: Troy
Details: The road is being reconstructed and resurfaced.

14-986
From: Franklin to Telegraph Community: Bloomfield Township
Details: There will be periodic lane closures for resurfacing through July.

14-986
At: Telegraph Road Community: Southfield
Details: Two left lanes are closed. The ramp from northbound Northwestern to southbound Telegraph will be closed intermittently during non-rush hour periods through July 31. The ramp from northbound Telegraph to I-696 and northbound Northwestern Highway will be closed until Oct. 30.

14-986
From: Northbound Northwestern Highway and southbound Southfield Road Community: Southfield
Details: One lane will be closed through Oct. 1.

14-986
At: Grand River Community: Farmington
Details: There will be alternating lane closures through Aug. 13.

14-986
From: Rochester Road to Buell Community: Oakland Township
Details: The road is being resur-

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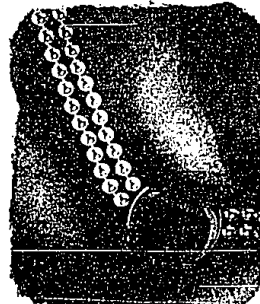
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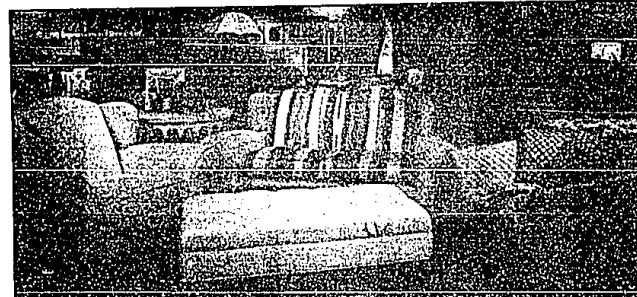
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