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Tillamook County Jail is a captivating Country Tune

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TILLAMOOK < Country music singer Todd Snider just thought he'd be taking a long, quiet drive down U.S. 101 to see his mom. He never would have guessed that before reaching Port Orford, he would get up-close and personal with State Police, get a six-hour tour of the Tillamook County Jail, and write one of his most popular songs to date.

Snider, 38, has sold more than 40,000 copies of his latest release < East Nashville Skyline, a CD Blender Magazine rated as one of the top 50 albums of 2004. Snider said thousands of fans across the country scream for his current single, "Tillamook County Jail," a song he wrote to immortalize his run-in with a disgruntled highway worker and the local law enforcement.

It all started when Snider decided to use some time off from recording and touring to visit his mother in Curry County. Rather than take the shortest route via Interstate 5 and U.S. 126, Snider decided to take the more scenic drive, traveling west from Portland, and all the way south on U.S. 101.

Somewhere between Bay City and Tillamook, Snider came upon a highway road crew that he said became instantly agitated with him.

"I just came up to the construction thing, and I didn't understand what I was supposed to do," Snider said. He didn't see any signs telling him to stop, so he guessed where he needed to stop.

One highway worker became angry, Snider said. "I stopped, but I guess I didn't stop where he wanted me to. He said, 'Learn to read, $hole!'"

Snider said he then flashed his middle fingers at the highway worker, cursing at him. The State Police caught up to him 20 miles later, and pulled him over.

The officer told Snider the road crew had reported that he had zoomed through the construction zone at 60 miles per hour, flipping everyone off.

"I said that's not what happened at all," Snider recalled, "and they got mad." He said more police showed up, and surrounded his car for an hour while police returned to the highway workers to clarify their story.

"The cop knew who I was," Snider said. "He had heard my songs, so I was like, 'Hey, so aren't you going to let me go?'" He didn't. When the police returned, Snider was arrested, and charged with reckless endangerment of a highway worker, a Class A misdemeanor.

Snider said the angry highway worker obviously convinced his coworkers to fabricate a story to get him in trouble. He said it was his and his wife's word against theirs, and "I lost two to five. When I look back, what they did was much more clever than flipping someone off."

Eventually, Snider plead guilty so he wouldn't have to come all the way back to Tillamook County for a trial. In addition to paying a \$3,000 fine, Snider's license was suspended 90 days, and he was ordered to perform 60 hours of community service. But he said he got his artistic revenge.

During his six-hour stay in the Tillamook County Jail, Snider heard a phrase that sparked his interest from the woman who was taking his fingerprints. She said, "Our motto around here is, people come on vacation, and leave on probation."

"I told her I was going to make a song about that," Snider said. Rather than rant and rave about his situation, Snider used his time in jail to pen a song. "The first thing I said when I got out of jail was, 'I think I got something going here.'"

In "Tillamook County Jail," Snider's lyrics reflect his equal emotions of aggravation and amusement of the day's events. Aside from singing about the "lying son-of-a-gun" highway worker and fearing that his wife wouldn't pay his bail, Snider took the opportunity to also employ some poetic license.

He sings, "Got a lump on my head, and a boot print on my chest from what the guys in here call the Tillamook County lie detector test."

"I can guarantee he received no injuries while he was in our custody," said Tillamook County Sheriff Todd Anderson, who thought Snider's lyrics were funny. "I'm just glad we could provide him some lyrics for his song."

Snider confessed he never experienced police brutality. "That was a line I'd been carrying around for a while. I just found my chance to use it." He said that overall, the police "were pretty nice" about the whole thing. "I think that's the only part of the song that's not true."

Another phrase turned out to be false. The song promises, "If I ever do get out on that highway again, I ain't ever going back to Tillamook County."

"I meant it at the time," Snider said, admitting that he had just passed through in November to pay his mother a Thanksgiving visit. "I went two miles per hour below the speed limit. The view is addictive < it's a nice drive if you're not getting arrested."