

Rising country music star Josh Thompson will take the stage in his hometown Friday at the Ozaukee County Fair

When country singer Josh Thompson, a 1997 graduate of Cedarburg High School, takes the grandstand stage at the Ozaukee County Fair in his hometown on Friday night, he will debut his new single “Cold Beer With Your Name on It.”

It will be released Aug. 12.

“A concert in my hometown means a lot to me,” Thompson said from his home in Nashville. “It’s where I grew up, graduated, had friends, worked, played and drank my first beer. Lots of inspiration comes from there, and it’s almost like coming full circle to get to play there now.

“I’ve played a few times in Ozaukee County, but they were all acoustic. This will be a full band and good and loud.”

His gritty, beer-fueled songs resonate with hard-working, hard-drinking, hard-playing men and women, and he expects the fair crowd that will be filled with familiar faces to enjoy it.

His first single, “Beer on the Table,” hit No. 16 on the Billboard Country Music chart in 2009, and it’s been a whirlwind ride ever since for Thompson, who’s toured worldwide with top country singers and written countless songs for them and himself.



It’s a big departure from the natural resources career he originally planned.

Thompson — who knows what it’s like to work hard (he worked in his father’s cement business) and enjoy a cold beer afterward — didn’t learn to play a guitar until he was 21.

Country roads bringing him home

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“When I learned a couple of chords, I started to write, and it slowly became a necessity for me to write and express that creative side of me,” Thompson said.

He worked for his father through high school and summers while pursuing a natural resources degree at Fox Valley Technical College in Appleton.

“I guess what made me become a singer-songwriter is a love for music,” he said. “What prompted me was no one called me back for a job in natural resources.”

So in 2005, Thompson picked up his guitar and went to Nashville. He got a job pouring cement to pay the bills. The last time he poured cement was in 2008, shortly after he was signed by Sony Columbia Records in Nashville.

In addition to his own recordings, Thompson wrote Jason Aldean’s “Church Pew or Bar Stool,” Brad Paisley’s “A Man Don’t Have to Die,” Gary Allen’s “Tough Goodbye,” James Wesley’s “Thank a Farmer” and Merle Haggard’s “Mamma Tried.”

Thompson has toured with Paisley, Allen, Hank Williams Jr., Eric Church, Dierks Bentley and Rodney Atkins.

His tour schedule this year has 150 venues, including the Ozaukee County Fair and a November “Off the Beaten Path” tour with Justin Moore and Randy Houser.

That doesn’t leave much time to visit his mother Barb Bagless in Port Washington or sister Nicole in Cedarburg.

Playing at the fair will bring back memories, he said.

“We went to the fair every year,” Thompson said. “I have great memories from it. Most fond to me would be when my father was still alive. We always went as a family.”

His father died in 1997.

Thompson said his favorite tours are to places like Montana and Alaska.

“Especially when I have time to enjoy the sights and do some fishing,” he said.

“The worst tours were probably back before we had a tour bus, and we were in the van playing house-band gigs and had to sleep in roach-infested band houses.”

Thompson said he believes his songs resonate with people because they’re honest.

A favorite song he’s written and recorded himself, Thompson said, is “Sinner.” He chose “Mamma Tried” by Merle Haggard as his favorite composition recorded by someone else.

Thompson will take the stage at 9 p.m. Chasin’ Mason, a country rock band signed by

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K-Nation Entertainment in Grafton, will open for Thompson at 6 p.m.

Tickets are \$15 for general admission grass seating or \$25 for reserved seats.

More information on Thompson is available at www.JoshThompsonofficial.com.

Information on the fair is available at www.ozaukeecountyfair.com.