

Joyce Conseen Dugan
Doctor of Laws

Joyce Conseen Dugan is a past principal chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and currently the director of external relations and career development for Harrah's Cherokee Casino and Hotel. Born on the Cherokee reservation, Dugan was drawn in her early career to education as the gateway for advancement of the Cherokee people. While working as a teacher assistant, she graduated *cum laude* from Western Carolina in 1975 with a degree in education. For the next decade she was a special education teacher in the Bureau of Indian Affairs school in Cherokee, meanwhile earning her M.S. in education from Western Carolina in 1981. Soon recognized as a leader in the field of Indian education, Dugan became increasingly influential in the school programs of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. When the Bureau turned over control of reservation schools to the Eastern Band of Cherokees, Dugan became director of education and undertook the creation of a new school system. She worked to integrate Cherokee culture and language instruction throughout the curriculum, a strategy that remains in effect today. In 1995 Dugan was elected principal chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee, the first woman to hold that position. As principal chief she worked for broad inclusion in the operation of government; sought to revitalize Cherokee culture; put the Cherokee on record with those who seek to promote protection of the environment; advocated responsible gaming laws; and promoted improved health standards for the Cherokee with special emphasis on diabetes. Upon completing her term as principal chief, Dugan accepted a position at one of the tribal enterprises, Harrah's Cherokee Casino, where she developed and supervised a training program to prepare members of the Eastern Band for senior management positions at the casino. Today she focuses on external relations and career development for the casino. Among her many honors, Dugan has been named Distinguished Woman of North Carolina in the Field of Education (1992), Western Carolina University Alumna of the Year (1997), and Outstanding Woman for Western North Carolina (2000). In 2003 she collaborated with Lynne Harlan, her assistant, to write a tabletop book, *The Cherokee*, to provide visitors a glimpse of Cherokee history and art, further continuing her efforts to promote cultural integrity. Dugan presently serves on the North Carolina Tourism Board, the Blue Ridge Heritage Area Board, and the Cherokee Indian Hospital Board of Governors.