

Joe Byrd

Senior Advisor

Joe Byrd is a senior advisor at the Watts Consulting Group.

As a senior advisor, Joe directs economic development projects for the firm with a special emphasis on Native American tribes. Joe is currently president of Native American Partners, LLC, a firm specializing in business development and financing hotels, retail and entertainment ventures for Native American tribes. Joe is also the Chairman of the National Native American Chamber of Commerce.

Joe formerly held the position of Chief of the Cherokee Nation. Joe was the first bilingual Chief of the tribe in 200 years. In that capacity, and today, he has diligently worked for preserving Native American sovereignty, rights, culture and furthering educational opportunities.

Joe was appointed by former Oklahoma governor Keating to the Oklahoma Native Culture Board, where he served two terms. Joe also held an appointment to the Planning Committee of the National Indian Policy Center in Washington, D.C. He has served as Vice President of the Cherokee Nation Higher Education Foundation, the only Cherokee council member to represent the tribe at the first White House Conference on Indian Education, a tribal delegate to the National Congress of American Indians, and a member of both the National Indian Education Association and the Oklahoma Association for Bilingual Education. Joe also co-founded the "Tsa-la-gi" Trail of Tears Awards for Excellence in education.

Under Joe's leadership, the Cherokee Nation administration secured funding for a number of new programs including first-time funding to design, build and renovate homes specifically for the elderly, renovated and improved three clinics; increased scholarship funding for Cherokee students based on merit; and, initiated numerous partnerships with outside agencies including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and initiated and signed the motor fuels compact resulting in millions of additional tribal dollars.

Joe's work in education also includes serving as the Education Coordinator for the Cross Cultural Education Center in Tahlequah, a Field Specialist in the Cherokee Nation Education Department, Bilingual Educator, Coach and Counselor at Oklahoma public schools. From these positions he earned a place on the Cherokee Nation council, becoming the council's youngest member. His diligent work on issues of education and development as a Councilmember later led to his appointment as Chief of the Cherokee Nation.

Joe remains active in the community; he is on the Board of Directors of the Native American Diabetes Association, and he has served as a Board Member for Cherokee County Little League Baseball as a local, state and national advocate for Drug Free Youth.