Dennis Ritchie, computer-programming pioneer, dies

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(AP) -- Dennis Ritchie, a pioneer in computer programming, has died at age 70, according to his longtime employer.

Ritchie created the popular C programming language and helped create the Unix operating software. He died a month after his birthday, according to his biography on a webpage of Alcatel-Lucent's Bell Labs. Ritchie joined Bell Labs in the late 1960s.

The company confirmed his death to The Associated Press but would not disclose the cause of death or when Ritchie died. A spokeswoman said the company was trying to contact his family.

Ritchie is best known for his contributions to computer programming and software. The C programming language, which Ritchie developed in the early 1970's, is still popular. It has gone through a number of upgrades, and it is commonly used for website development and other computer tasks. The Unix operating software also surged in popularity. It and its offshoots, including the open-source Linux, are widely used today, in corporate servers and even cellphones.

Ritchie's biography on the Bell Labs site says that he was born on Sept. 9, 1941 in Bronxville, N.Y., and studied physics and math at Harvard University.

"My undergraduate experience convinced me that I was not smart enough to be a physicist, and that computers were quite neat," Ritchie

wrote. "My graduate school experience convinced me that I was not smart enough to be an expert in the theory of algorithms and also that I liked procedural languages better than functional ones."

Jeong Kim, president of Bell Labs, wrote in a blog post Thursday that Ritchie was "truly an inspiration to all of us, not just for his many accomplishments, but because of who he was as a friend, an inventor, and a humble and gracious man."

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