

## Legendary scientist at lab that developed atomic bomb dies

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This undated photo provided by the Los Alamos National Laboratory shows Nerses "Krik" Krikorian. Krikorian, who escaped the Armenian genocide as a boy and later became a legend in the once-secret New Mexico city where the atomic bomb was developed, has died. He was 97. (Los Alamos National Laboratory )

Scientist Nerses "Krik" Krikorian, who was born a refugee and later became a legend in the once-secret New Mexico city where the atomic

bomb was developed, has died. He was 97.

Officials at Los Alamos National Laboratory confirmed that Krikorian died Wednesday at his home in Los Alamos, the mountain town he had called home for more than 70 years.

Krikorian was born on a Turkish roadside in 1921 as his parents were trying to flee the aftermath of the mass killings of Armenians by Ottoman Turks more than a century ago. With nothing but the clothes on their backs, the family moved around for the next four years and eventually found their way to the United States.

Krikorian spoke little English when they first arrived but went on to graduate with honors from college with a chemistry degree and landed a job working in a lab that made [highly enriched uranium](#). It wasn't until later that Krikorian learned that work was part of the top-secret Manhattan Project.

He later went to work directly for Los Alamos lab. He said in an interview for a lab profile that he had never been west of Detroit and made the long drive to New Mexico in a 1936 Chevy convertible. He met his wife in Los Alamos.

In a career that spanned more than four decades, he worked with uranium and later with Project Rover in the 1950s to develop a nuclear-thermal rocket for space applications. He held six patents and published numerous assessments before becoming head of security for an intelligence unit. He also won accolades for his work.

In a memo to employees this week, lab Director Terry Wallace described Krikorian as "a giant" in the world of national security science and in the Los Alamos community.

"He contributed enormously to the mission of the laboratory, and I can say with confidence it's a better place because of him," Wallace said. "As we celebrate our 75 years as a laboratory, few people have been more impactful on our history than Krik. He leaves an enduring legacy that will continue far into the future."

The Los Alamos Monitor reported that Krikorian also helped found the United Church of Los Alamos and J. Oppenheimer Memorial Committee and helped with the creation of the original charter for Los Alamos County.

The newspaper reported that he was known for his dedication to making what started out as a place for a secret laboratory into a real, working community.

"Things have worked out far beyond what I ever imagined. I think of my parents and wonder, 'How did they ever do it?' To be born on a roadside in Turkey to this," Krikorian said in 2017 Monitor article about his life. "My parents instilled in me the importance of doing the right thing and giving back to your fellow man. I hope I've done that."

Krikorian's story also is part of an oral history project featuring those who worked at the lab in the early days.

His daughter Deb Krikorian said her father's dedication was a natural outcome of his constant quest for knowledge and his pragmatic outlook on life.

Asked where Krikorian's thirst for knowledge came from, she said, "Curiosity."

"He was curious about everything. He loved to just sit down and read. Even when he couldn't read, he was listening to books on tape and things

like that," she said.

Krikorian had an extensive art collection, loved local theater and often acted in local productions. He also loved to fish.

A memorial service is being planned. A burial will be held Wednesday at Santa Fe National Cemetery.

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