

meet your NEIGHBORS:

By: Contributing Writer Meg Setz

The Hilliards & Grays

In April 2010, I found myself among a handful of women in Liz Hilliard's Beyond Barre class. On the verge of an embarrassing sweaty defeat at the ballet barre, I figured out two things: 1. Liz Hilliard was carving out an unparalleled fitness experience in Charlotte; 2. She was the perfect balance of power and passion to do so.

In spending time with Liz and her family over the last several years, I've come to understand the whole family operates both powerfully and passionately. That power and passion creates a spark – a spark that's visible between mom, Liz, and daughter,



From left, Robert & Clary Gray and Liz & Aubrey Hilliard

Clary Hilliard Gray, now Liz's partner in the fitness business. They talk to or text with each other constantly, finish each other's thoughts, and share the same sense of humor. They'll challenge each other before then erupting into laughter a couple seconds later. It's clear they're partners – in family and in business. And, in turn, their family's passion is their business.

To get to know the Hilliard-Gray family, you need to know the story behind the business that drives them. Hilliard Studio Method (HSM) is Liz Hilliard's brainchild. Hilliard's love of fitness led her to take part in extensive training as a Stott Certified Pilates instructor and then establish an impressive, private, training facility, Performance Pilates. Both experiences led her to develop HSM – a radical approach to the Charlotte fitness scene. A Myers Park resident since 2003, Liz decided to launch the Method to the public at Myers Park's Cornwell Center in 2008. Liz taught every class, every client. "I did it because I loved it," says Liz.

As class size and frequency grew steadily, so did the HSM brand. With a passion for travel, Liz started traveling the country (and then the world) to train with and learn from every barre method offered. She hired a personal trainer to help her launch the weight-training component which became just one cornerstone of the Method.

Liz's daughter, Clary Hilliard Gray, taught the Method for the Boston and Cambridge communities, while her husband, Robert Gray, completed his M.B.A. at Harvard. "When Clary was in Boston, we talked about and connected a lot over building the Method over the phone," says Liz. Following Robert's graduation in 2010, Clary and Robert returned to Charlotte where Clary and Liz started to grow the brand together.



In the Hilliard-Gray family, love and business go together. "This is what we do. Our passion is our business," says Liz. "And we really can't do it now without each other." Liz and Clary are partners in every aspect of the Method – from teaching classes and building the HSM team to managing build-out of the new space. As well, Clary's husband, Robert, works together with Liz's husband, Aubrey Hilliard, in the energy business. Today, Clary and Robert are raising their family in Myers Park. "Baby" Aubrey will be two years old this month; she relishes any opportunity to spend time in the studio with Clary and "Didi" – which is what Aubrey calls her grandmother, Liz. Clary and Robert are expecting their second child this month.

Liz's husband, Aubrey, focuses on fitness, as well. At 60, Aubrey re-committed to fitness, returning to his high school experience as a high jumper. Today, he ranks number two in the U.S. and as high as number three in the world for USA Masters Track and Field Association. He competed in four USTAF National Championships, winning two silver medals and two bronze medals.

Despite their busy respective professional and fitness schedules, Liz and Aubrey find time together. They will spend ten days together traveling through South America next month.

The Hilliards and Grays continue to grow business powerfully and passionately. HSM now includes 30 classes per week, eight trainers, over 1,200 Facebook fans, a series of DVDs, a Grand Opening Celebration featured in *The Charlotte Observer*, and a new studio.

"We're thrilled to open the new space at 516 Fenton Place in Myers Park," says Clary. "The Method is our baby. We're ready to show Charlotte and the nation what our family and our brand are all about."

For more information, including client testimonials from Myers Park neighbors Beth Davis, Pamela Izard, Michelle Neun, Amy Hines, Emily Harry, Renee McColl, Stephanie Timperman, and many more, please visit www.hilliardstudiomethod.com.

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