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Bryson et al.(10) **Pub. No.: US 2008/0156752 A1**(43) **Pub. Date: Jul. 3, 2008**(54) **MERCHANDISING SYSTEM**(75) Inventors: **M. Scott Bryson**, Brookfield, WI (US); **Gary M. Richter**, Waukesha, WI (US); **Terrence G. Bgerglund**, Hales Corners, WI (US); **Allen E. Johnson**, Hartford, WI (US)Correspondence Address:
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(63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 11/051,040, filed on Feb. 4, 2005, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 10/996,170, filed on Nov. 23, 2004, now Pat. No. 7,124,898, which is a continuation of application No. PCT/US04/23791, filed on Jul. 23,

2004, said application No. 11/051,040 is a continuation-in-part of application No. 10/272,527, filed on Oct. 15, 2002, now Pat. No. 6,886,699, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 10/132,662, filed on Apr. 25, 2002, now Pat. No. 7,028,852.

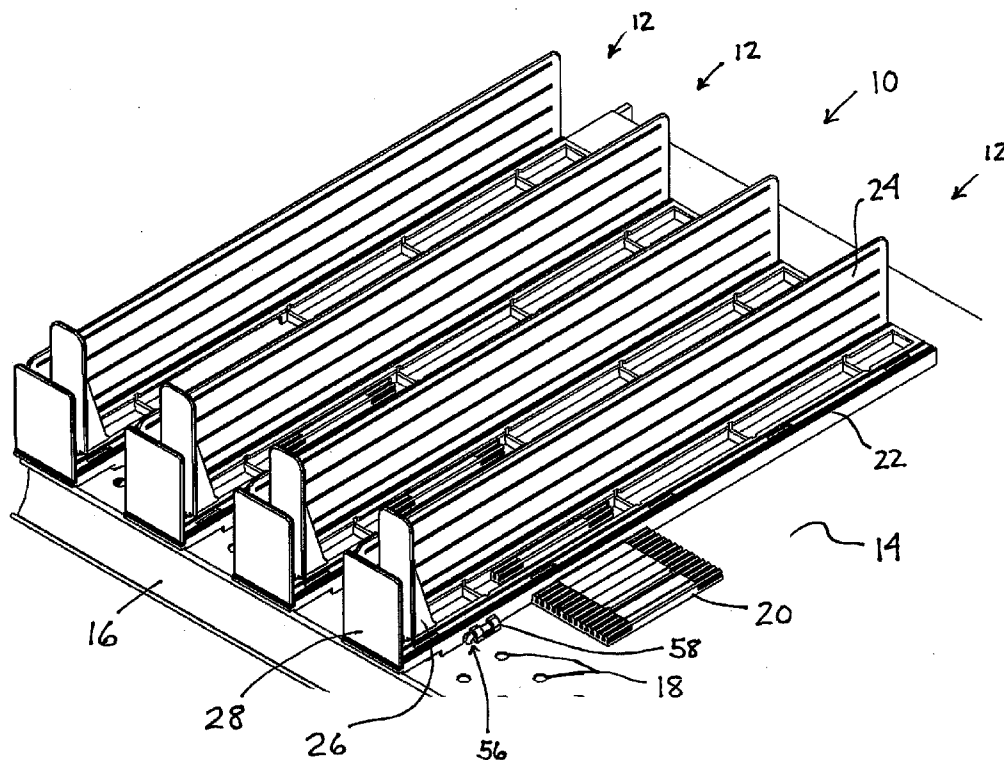
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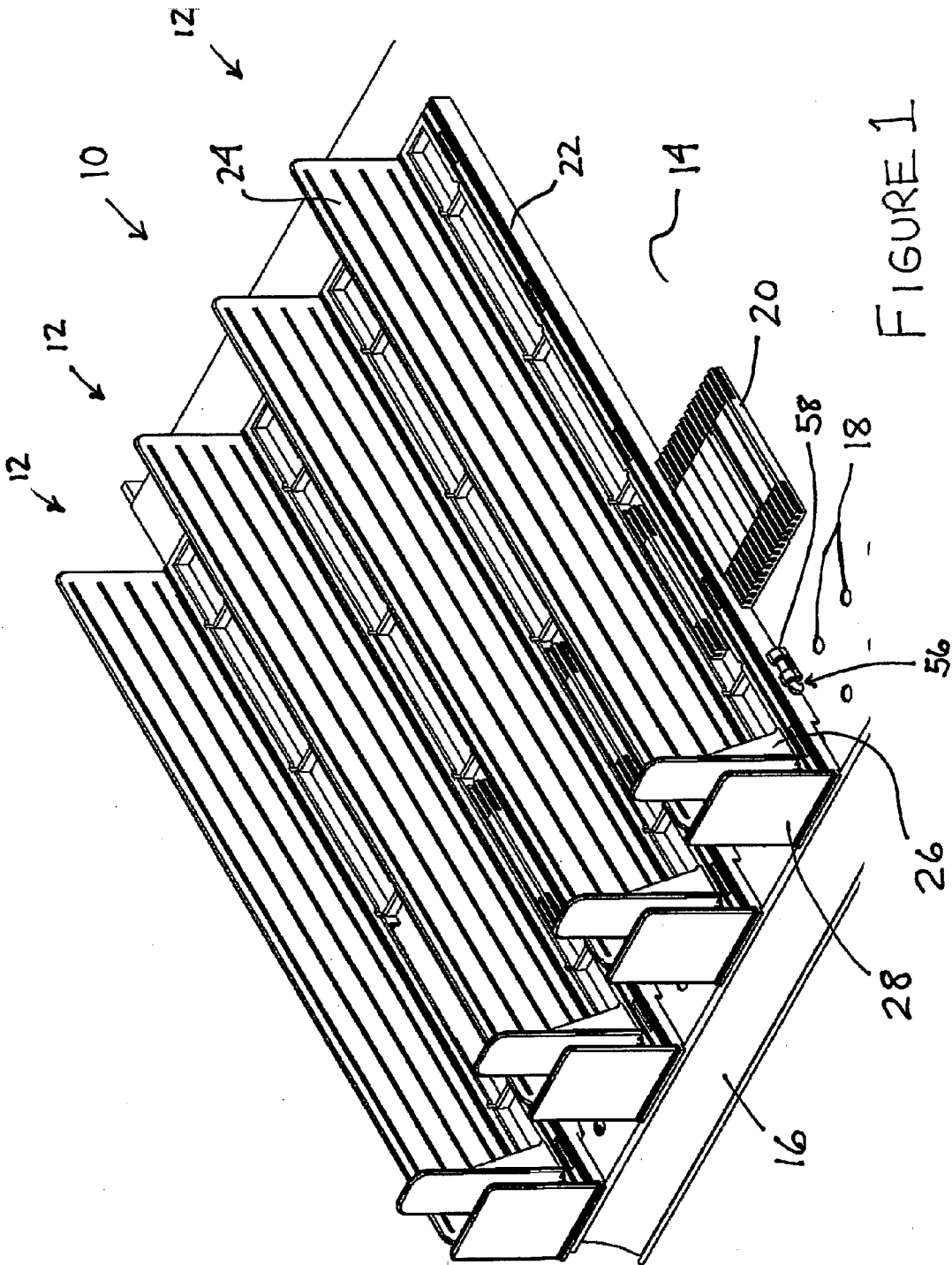
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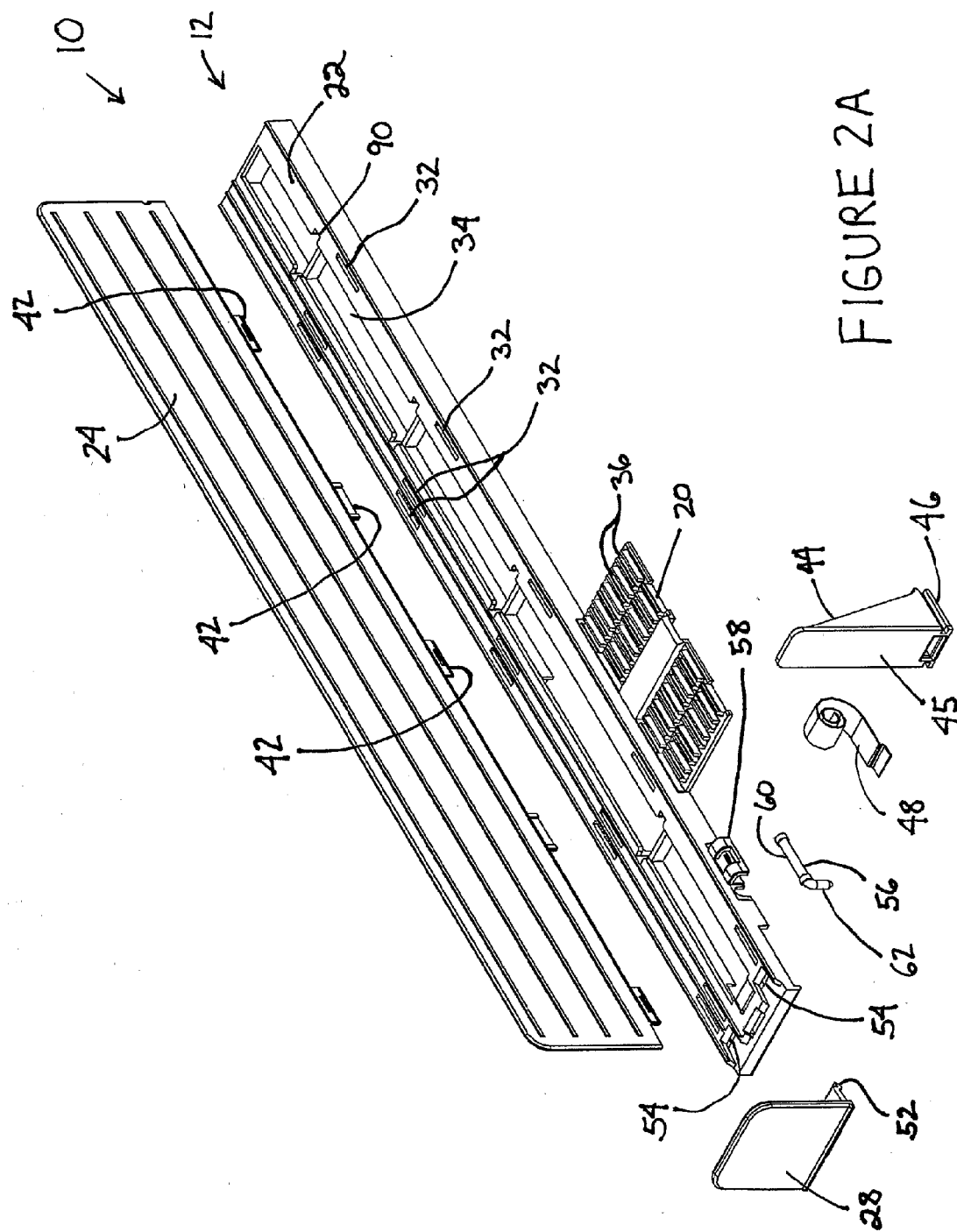
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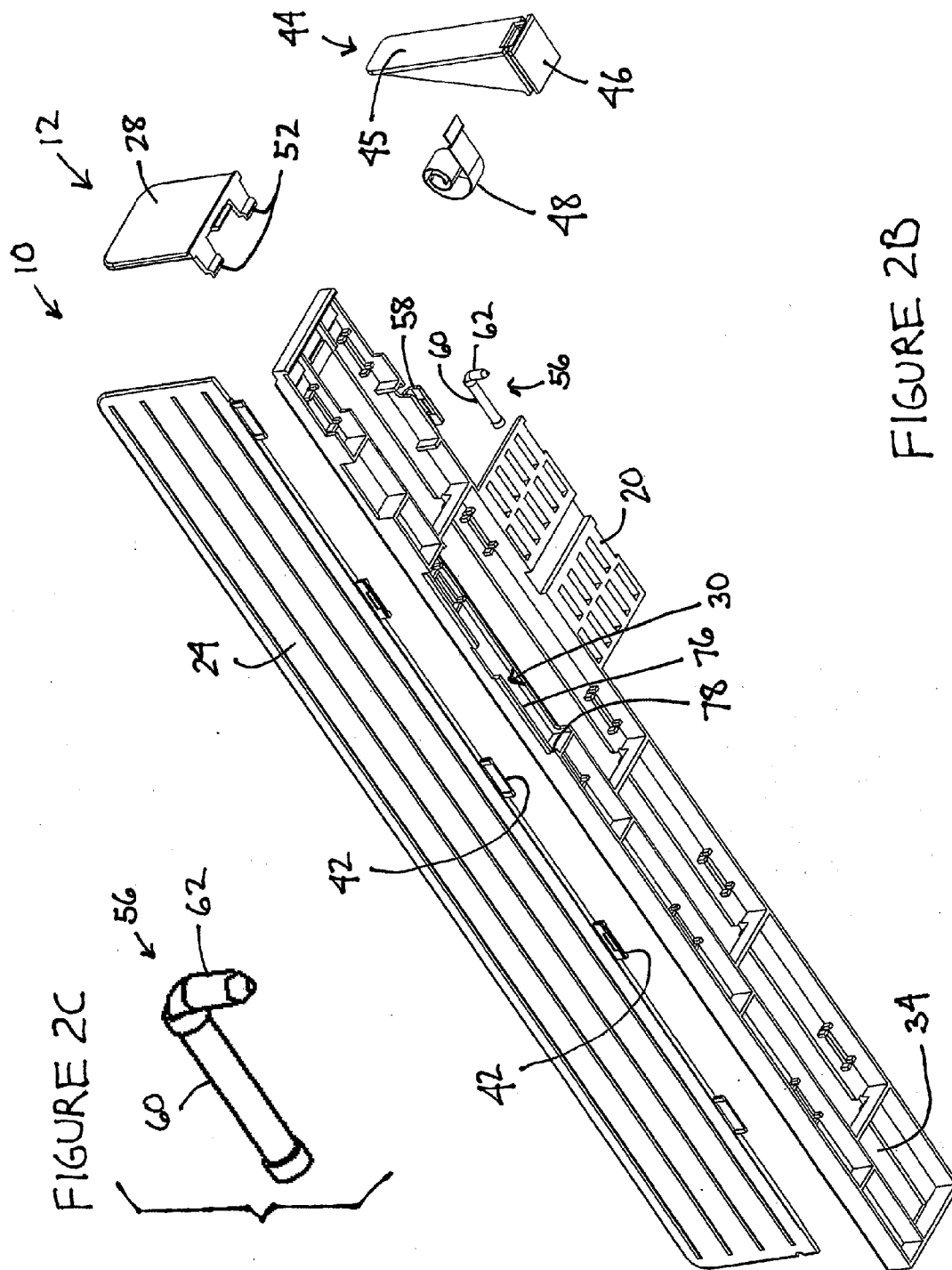
ABSTRACT

A merchandising system may comprise a first base comprising a horizontal surface and at least one vertical panel and a member configured to couple the merchandising system to a shelf system. The member may be configured to be provided in a first position where the member engages the shelf system and the member may be configured to be provided in a second position where the member is in a stowed position.









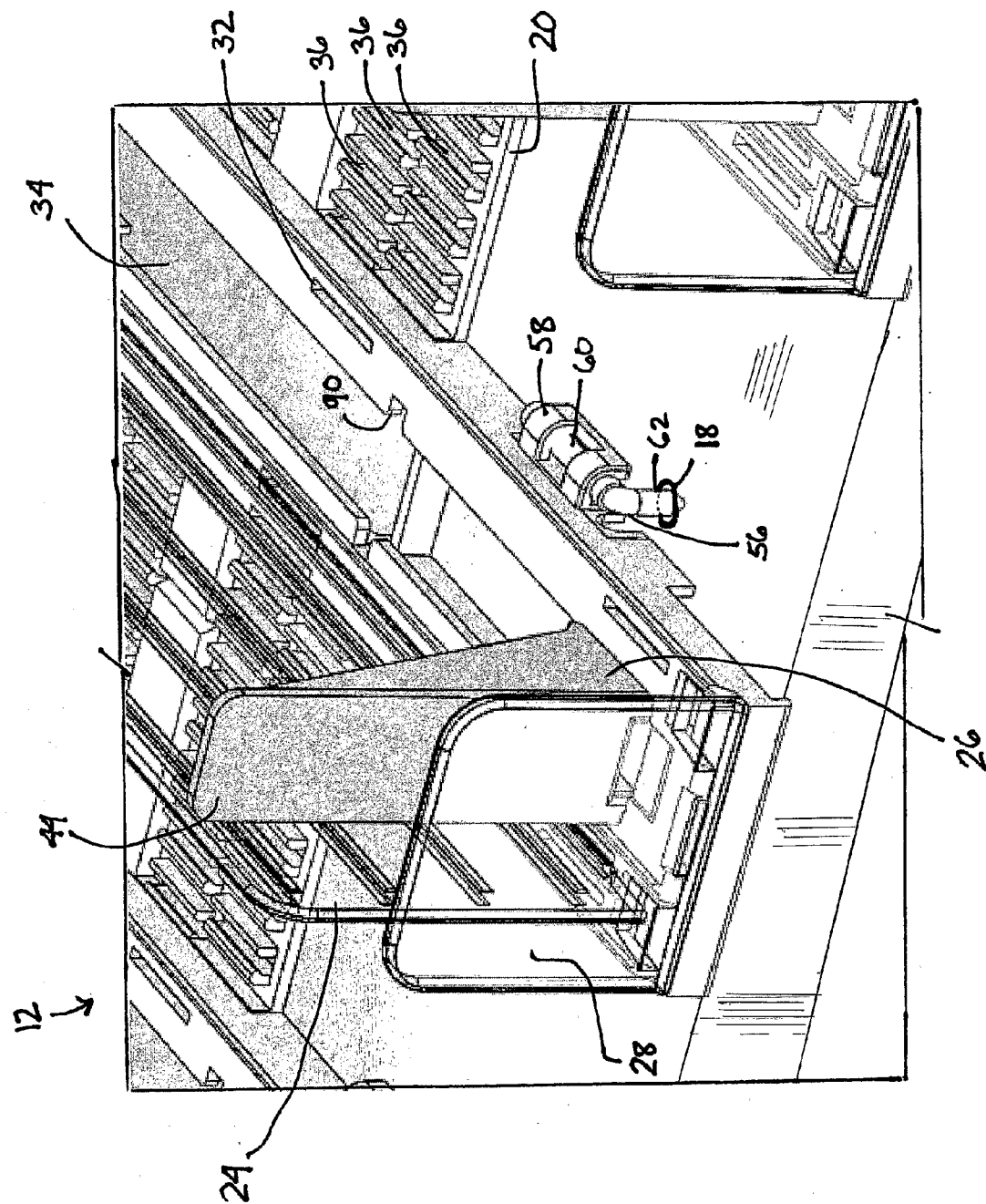


FIGURE 3

FIGURE 4A

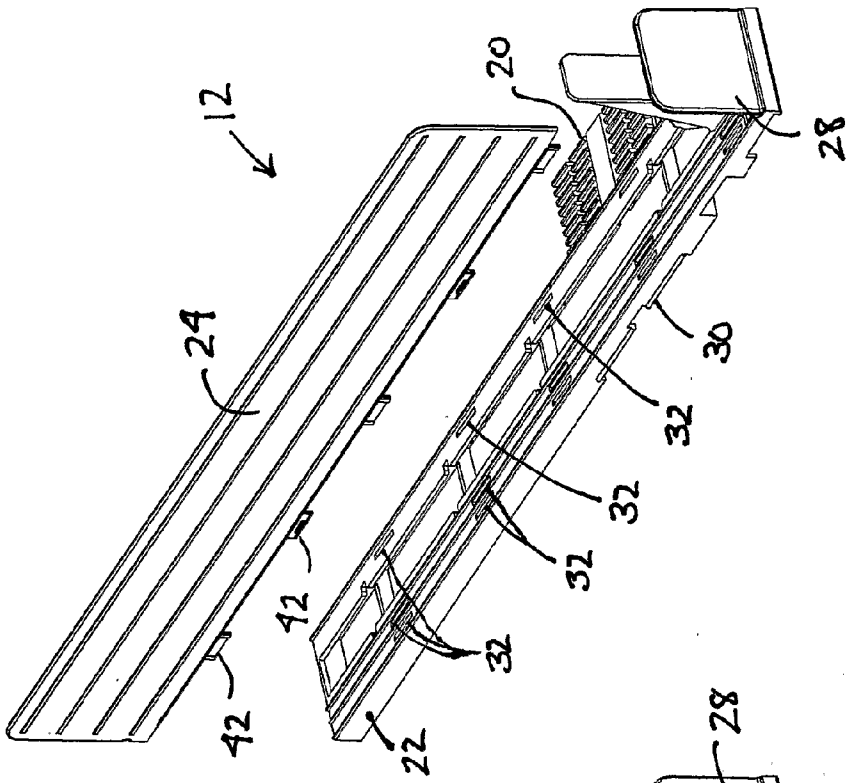
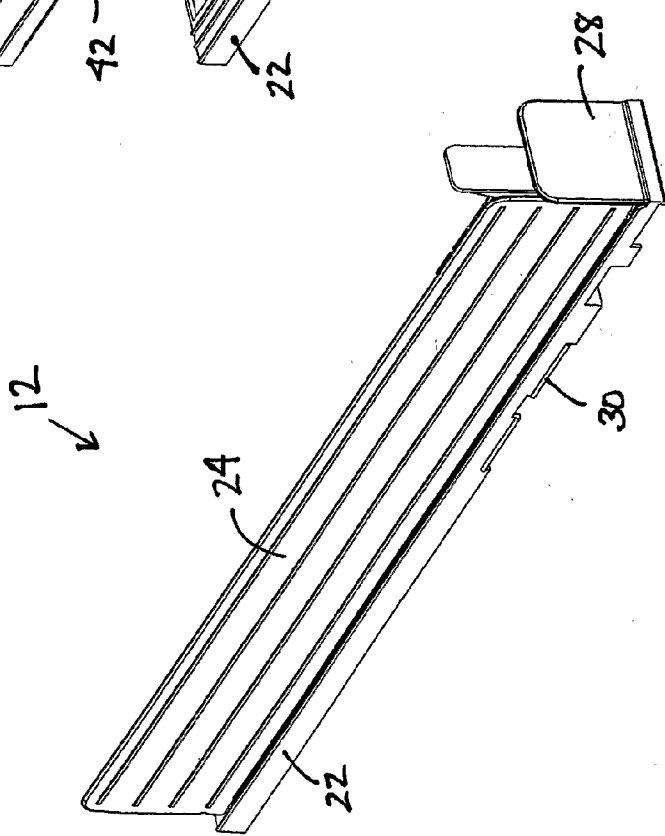


FIGURE 4B



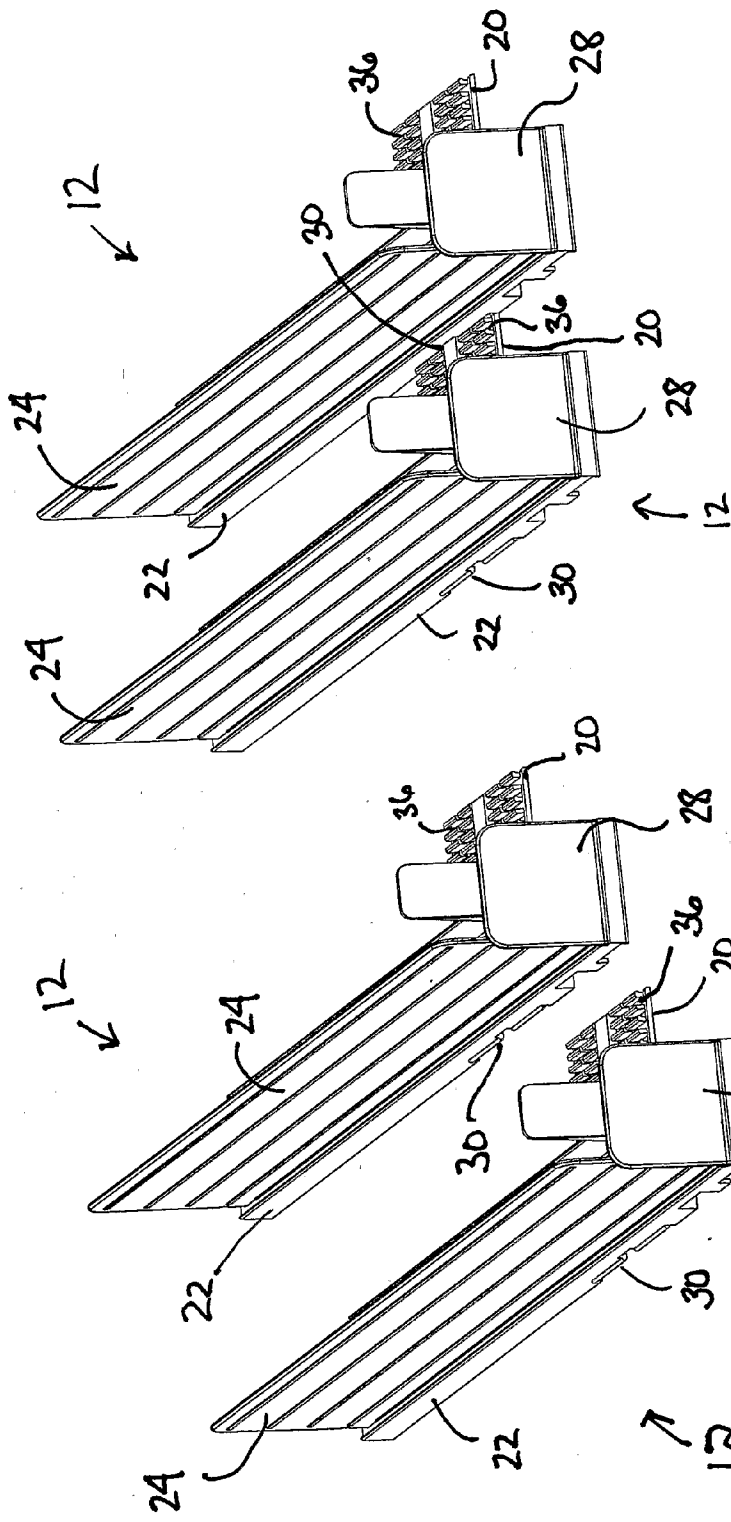


FIGURE 5B

FIGURE 5A

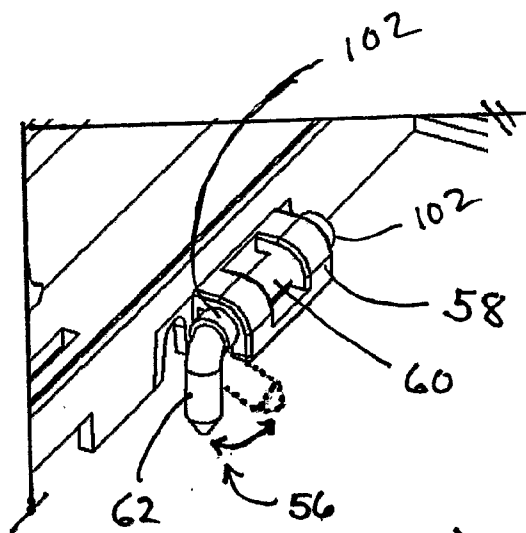


FIGURE 6A

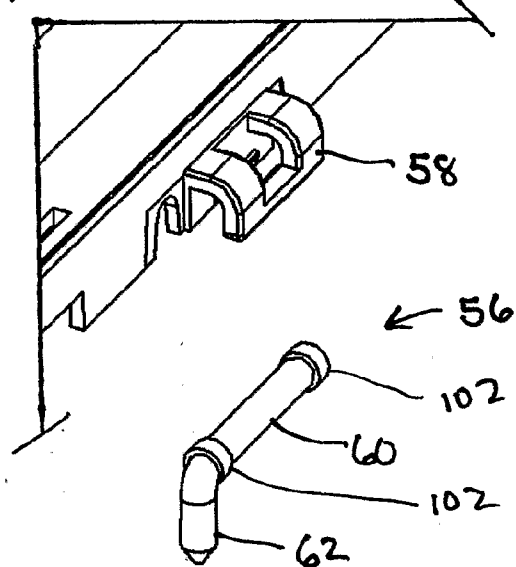


FIGURE 6B

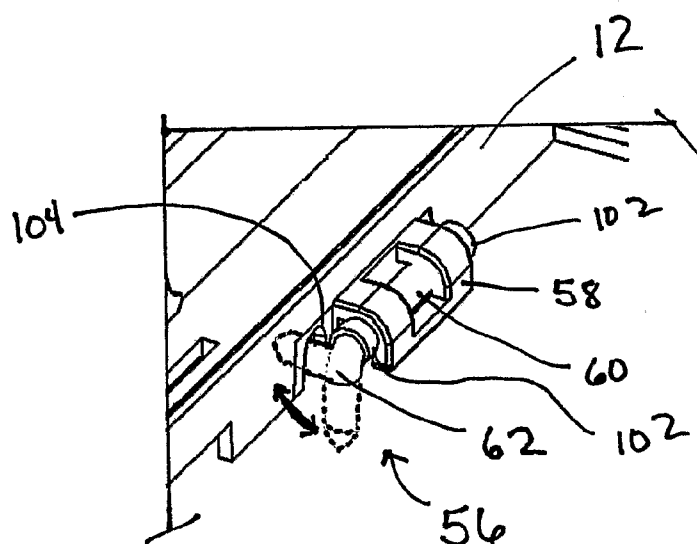


FIGURE 6C

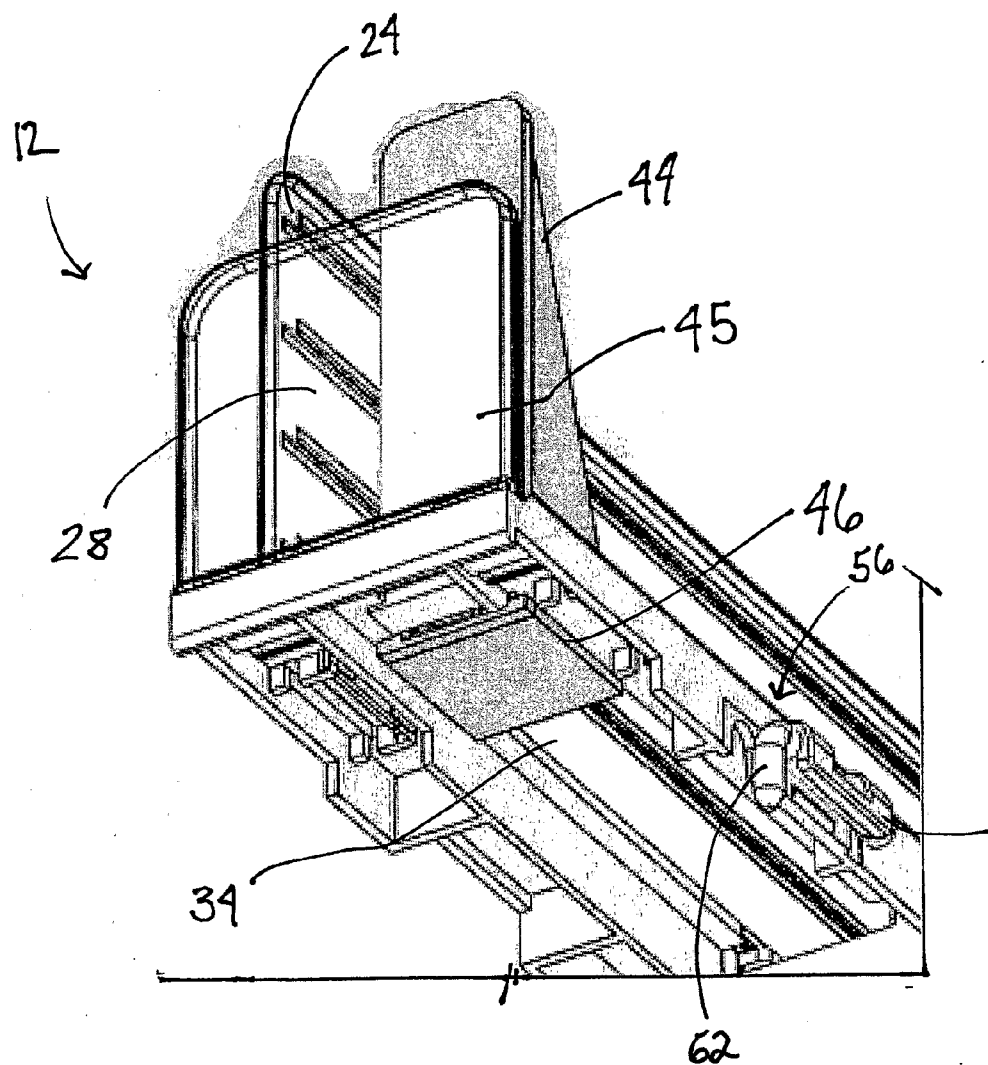


FIGURE 7

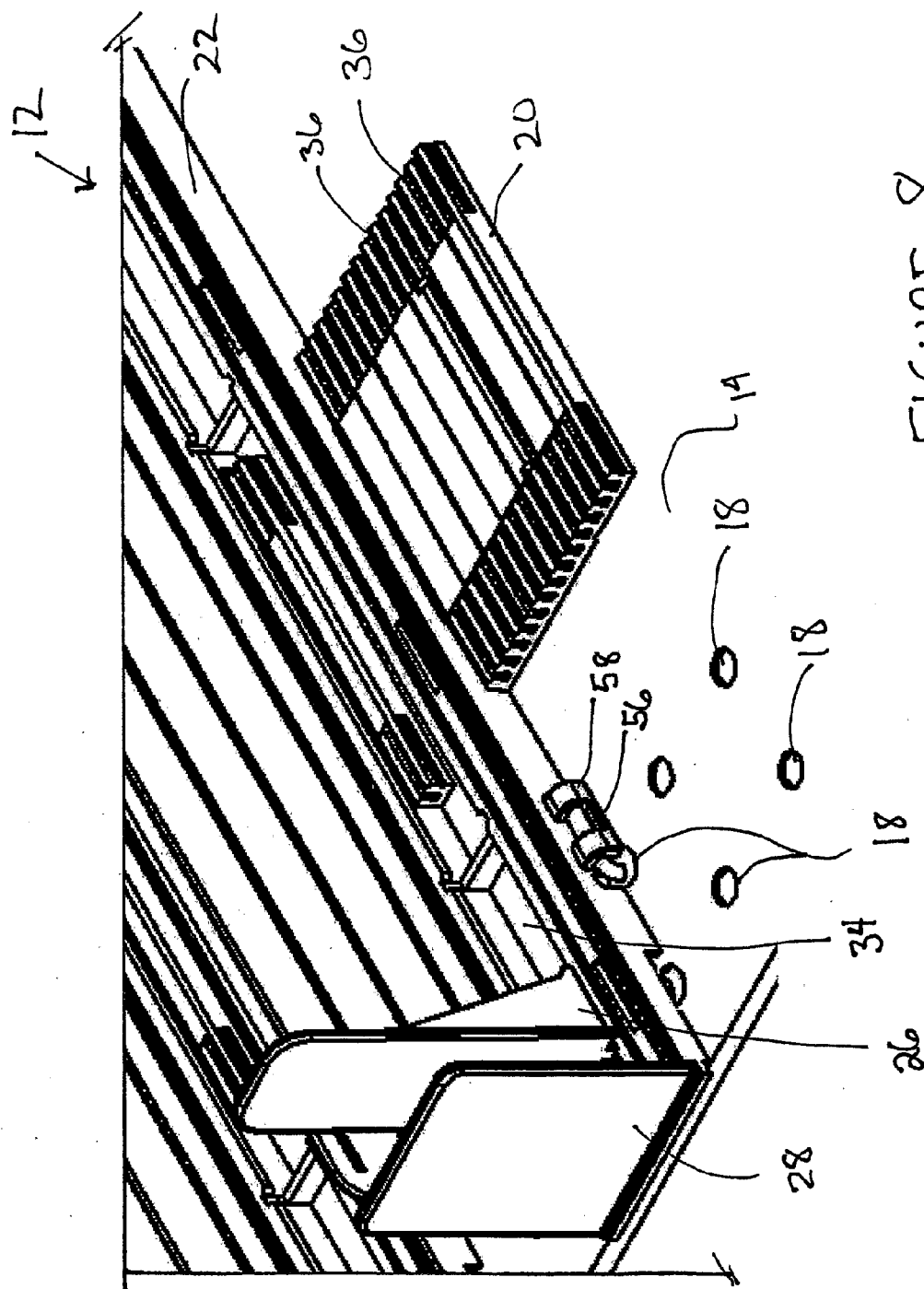


FIGURE 8

FIGURE 9A

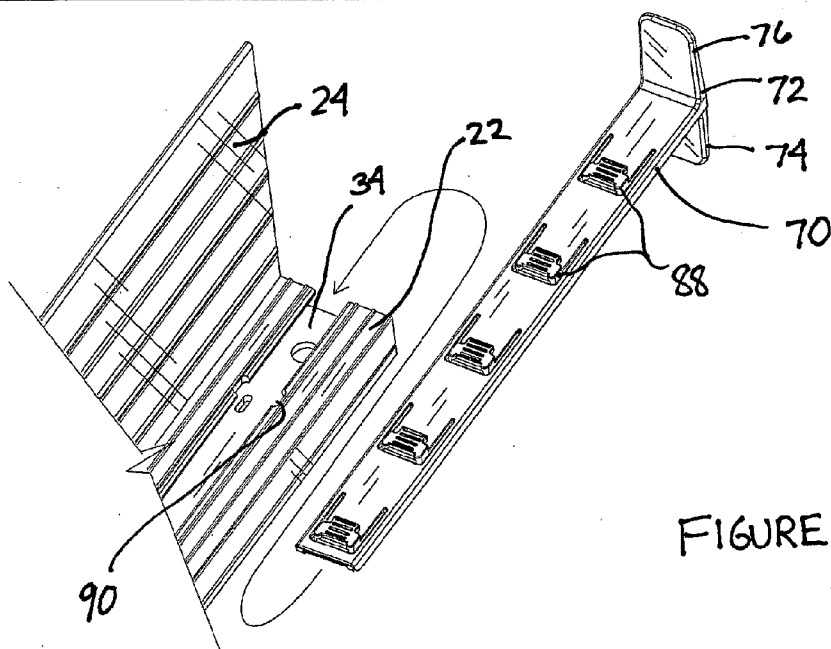
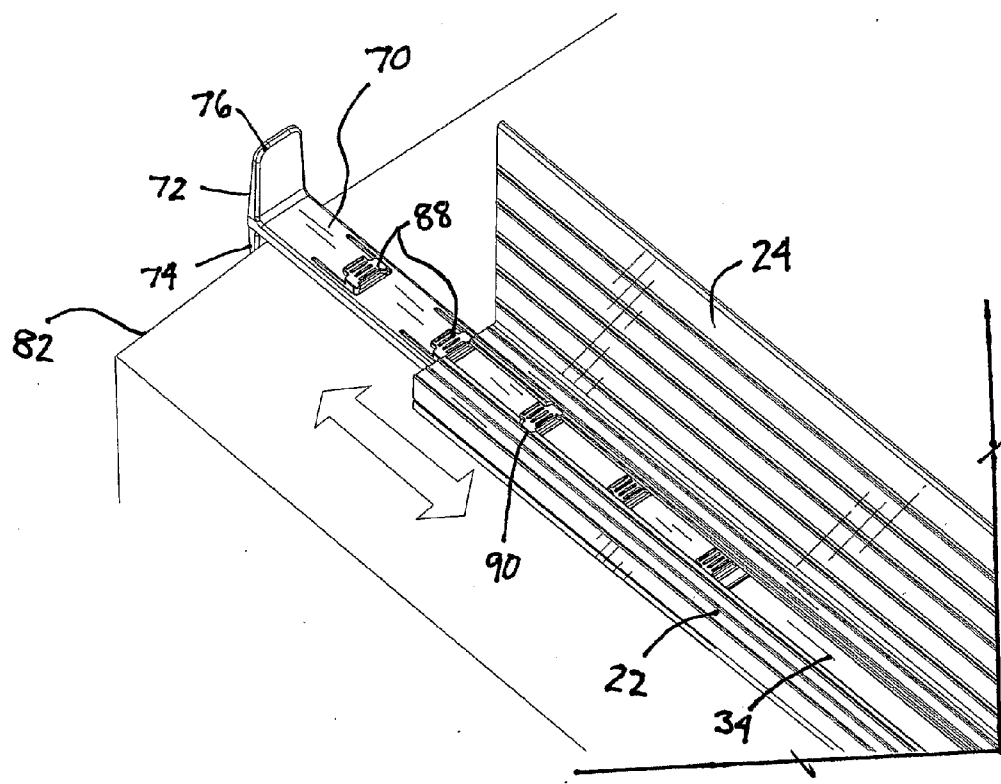
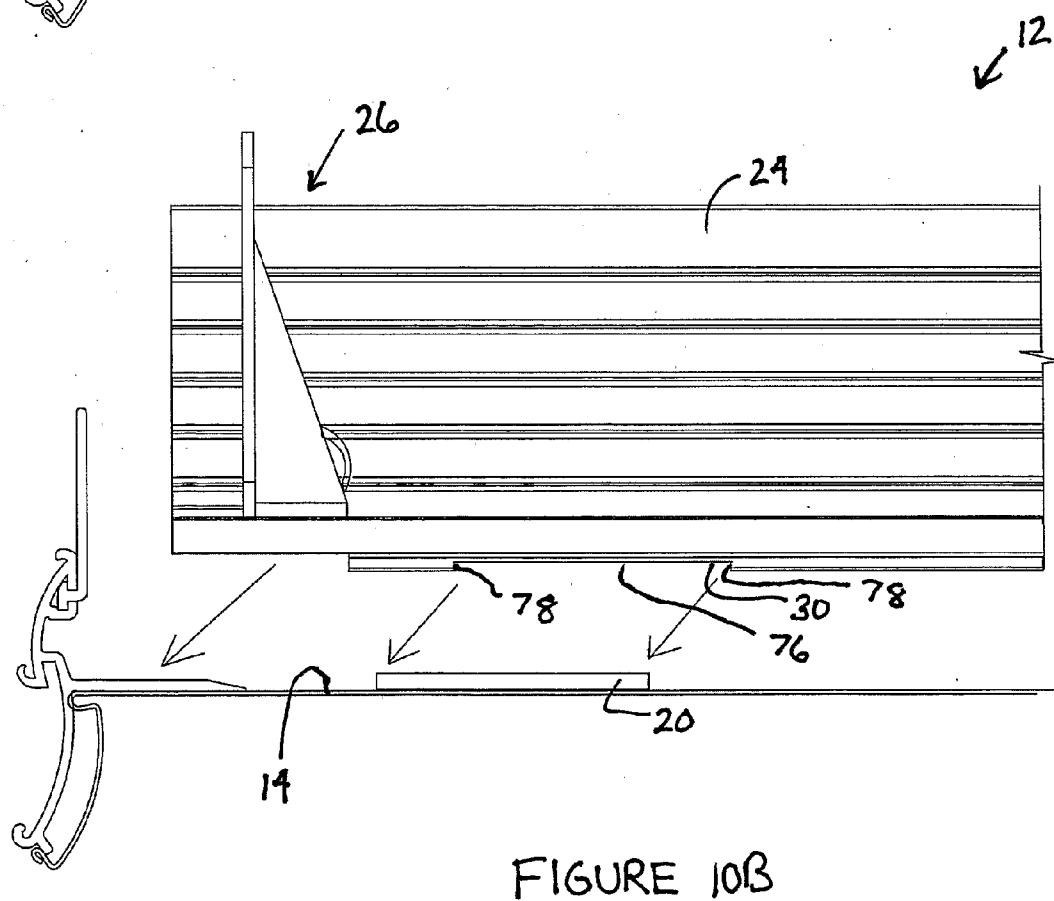
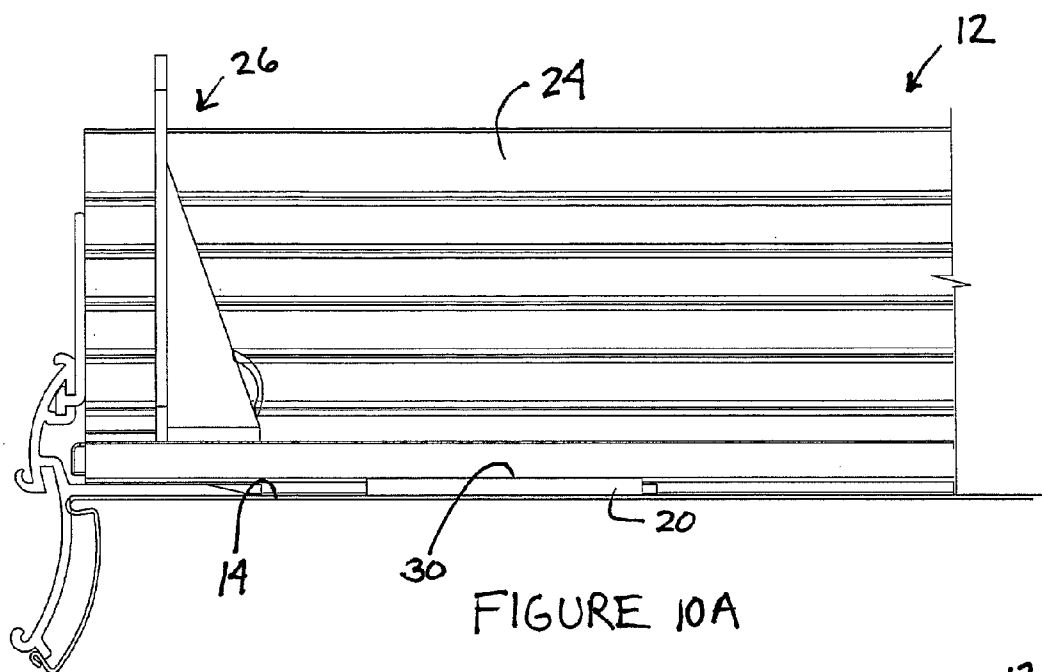


FIGURE 9B



MERCHANDISING SYSTEM

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED PATENT APPLICATIONS

[0001] This Application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. application Ser. No. 11/051,040, filed Feb. 4, 2005, which is a continuation-in-part of co-pending U.S. application Ser. No. 10/996,170, filed Nov. 23, 2004, which is a continuation of co-pending International Application No. PCT/US04/023791, filed on Jul. 23, 2004, which claims the benefit of U.S. Application Ser. No. 60/489,676, filed on Jul. 23, 2003, and which is a continuation-in-part application of U.S. application Ser. No. 10/272,527, filed Oct. 15, 2002, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,886,699, which claims the benefit of U.S. Application Ser. No. 60/329,656, filed on Oct. 15, 2001. This Application is a continuation-in-part application of co-pending U.S. application Ser. No. 10/132,662, filed on Apr. 25, 2002, which claims the benefit of the following patent applications: (1) U.S. Application Ser. No. 60/286,892, filed on Apr. 26, 2001, (2) U.S. Application Ser. No. 60/313,894, filed on Aug. 21, 2001, (3) U.S. Application Ser. No. 60/329,656, filed on Oct. 15, 2001, and (4) U.S. Application Ser. No. 60/335,924, filed on Oct. 31, 2001. This application claims the benefit of priority of U.S. Application Ser. No. 60/588,665, filed on Jul. 16, 2004.

[0002] This Application claims the benefit of priority as available under 35 U.S.C. §§ 119-121 and 365 to the following Patent Applications (which are hereby incorporated by reference in the present Application): (1) U.S. application Ser. No. 11/051,040, filed Feb. 4, 2005; (2) U.S. application Ser. No. 10/996,170, filed on Nov. 23, 2004; (3) International Application No. PCT/US04/023791, filed on Jul. 23, 2004; (4) U.S. application Ser. No. 10/272,527, filed Oct. 15, 2002, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,886,699; (5) U.S. application Ser. No. 10/132,662, filed on Apr. 25, 2002; (6) U.S. Application Ser. No. 60/489,676, filed on Jul. 23, 2003; (7) U.S. Application Ser. No. 60/286,892, filed on Apr. 26, 2001; (8) U.S. Application Ser. No. 60/313,894, filed on Aug. 21, 2001; (9) U.S. Application Ser. No. 60/329,656, filed on Oct. 15, 2001; (10) U.S. Application Ser. No. 60/335,924, filed on Oct. 31, 2001; and (11) U.S. Application Ser. No. 60/558,665, filed on Jul. 16, 2004.

FIELD

[0003] The present invention relates to merchandising systems and methods. In particular, the present invention relates to a merchandising system providing for orderly presentation, display, storage, arrangement, and dispensing of articles.

BACKGROUND

[0004] It is known to provide for merchandising systems that may be used for displaying and dispensing an article. Such merchandising systems do not realize certain advantageous features (and/or combinations of features). It is also known to provide for a merchandising system that may be used for displaying products in consumer settings such as grocery stores, retail outlets, shops, etc. Such known merchandising systems may be used to present, display and store products in fixed or limited spaces such as on shelves, in display cases, in cabinets, etc.

[0005] It is beneficial when merchandising an article such as a product to allow potential customers to view or handle it in a convenient and comfortable manner. Known merchan-

dising systems may display products to a consumer by providing the products in inefficient configurations. Products and product containers come in a variety of sizes and shapes, and some products may be more difficult to merchandise (e.g., present for potential retail sale) than others. Within fixed or limited spaces, known merchandising systems may not be configured to optimize the presentation of such products to a consumer. Such known merchandising systems also do not always provide convenient ways for dispensing products, especially those with unique or irregular shapes. Ease of use can be an important concern for customers and store personnel. As is sometimes the case, product or container design may be dictated by considerations separate from the ease or difficulty with which the product may be presented.

[0006] Some known merchandising systems may not provide effective arrangements for displaying, storing and presenting articles. Some merchandising systems fail to provide adequate support for articles, as well as smooth, efficient sliding of the article along the length of the system. Some merchandising systems do not provide sufficient arrangements of advancing these types of articles along the merchandising system. Some merchandising systems do not provide strong and/or rigid support for articles. Accordingly, many merchandising systems may not provide articles in a straight, linear, or level arrangement due to sagging, deformation, bowing, deflection and/or movement due to the weight of the articles. In addition, some merchandising systems do not provide for a variety of differently sized articles and are not configured to operate with a variety of shelving structures. Some merchandising systems do not retain articles for proper dispensing. Some merchandising systems are not easily repositionable on a shelving structure. Some known merchandising systems are not configured for easy loading or removal of articles or for at least partially restricting movement of the articles along the system.

[0007] Accordingly, it would be advantageous to provide a merchandising system that is configured for stocking, orderly presentation, and convenient storage of products with various shapes including shapes that may not be easily stored, presented, or displayed, such as products with uniquely shaped containers. It would also be advantageous to provide a merchandising system that is configured for selective modularity in the construction and assembly of the merchandising system. It would further be advantageous to provide a merchandising system that allows for the construction and assembly of a merchandising system with any number of product facings, modules, compartments, etc. It would further be advantageous to provide a merchandising system configured for the selective and/or independent adjustment of width or spacing of a shelf division or divisions without requiring adjustment of adjacent divisions. It would further be advantageous to provide a merchandising system in which the size of one division could be enlarged or reduced without enlarging or reducing the size of adjacent divisions. It would further be advantageous to provide a merchandising system with divisions that are conveniently and selectively adjustable in size and/or shape. It would further be advantageous to provide a merchandising system configured for selective movement of a divider to discrete locations. It would further be advantageous to provide a merchandising system that advances a product and/or allows a product to advance along a defined path. It would further be advantageous to provide a merchandising system that self-faces articles (e.g., allows articles to move to the front of the system after articles are removed). It

would be advantageous to provide a merchandising system that is configured to easily move articles along a path for stocking, aligning, and/or facing purposes. It would further be advantageous to provide a merchandising system that can evenly distribute the weight of articles and/or products over the length of the system. It would further be advantageous to provide a merchandising system that allows for smooth, controlled, and efficient gliding of articles and/or products along the length of the system.

[0008] It would be advantageous to provide a system that provides any one or more of these or other advantageous features.

SUMMARY

[0009] The present invention relates to a merchandising system comprising a first base comprising a front, a back, a horizontal surface and at least one vertical panel, a member configured to couple the first base to a shelf system, and an interface coupling the member to the first base. The member is configured to be provided in a first position so that the member engages the shelf system thereby coupling the first base to the shelf system, and the member is configured to be provided in a second position so that the member is in a stowed position.

[0010] The present invention also relates to a merchandising system for articles comprising a first track comprising a horizontal surface having a first interface and a second interface provided on the horizontal surface, a second track comprising a horizontal surface having a third interface and a fourth interface provided on the horizontal surface, a first vertical panel having a first protrusion, and a second vertical panel having a second protrusion. The first track further comprises a connector that releasably couples the first track to the second track. A compartment of a first size is provided when the first protrusion of the first vertical panel is coupled to the first interface of the first track and the second protrusion of the second vertical panel is coupled to the third interface of the second track. A compartment of a second size is provided when the first protrusion of the first vertical panel is coupled to the second interface of the first track and the second protrusion of the second vertical panel is coupled to the third interface of the second track.

[0011] The present invention further relates a merchandising system for articles comprising a first member having a first connector and a horizontal surface that comprises a series of apertures, a second member having a second connector and a horizontal surface that comprises a series of apertures, a first divider comprising a first protrusion configured to engage one of the series of apertures, and a second divider comprising a second protrusion configured to engage one of the series of apertures. The first connector releasably couples the first member to the second member and the first member comprises a pin configured to be inserted into an aperture provided on a shelf system to secure the first member to the shelf system.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] FIG. 1 is a front perspective view of a merchandising system according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0013] FIG. 2A is an exploded front perspective view of a merchandising system of FIG. 1 according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0014] FIG. 2B is an exploded bottom perspective view of a merchandising system of FIG. 1 according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0015] FIG. 2C is a detailed perspective view of a portion of the merchandising system of FIG. 2B according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0016] FIG. 3 is a partial front perspective view of the merchandising system of FIG. 1 according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0017] FIG. 4A is a partially exploded perspective view of a merchandising system according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0018] FIG. 4B is a front perspective view of the merchandising system of FIG. 4A according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0019] FIG. 5A is a front perspective view of a merchandising system according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0020] FIG. 5B is a front perspective view of a merchandising system according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0021] FIG. 6A is a partial front perspective view of a merchandising system according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0022] FIG. 6B is a partially exploded perspective view of a merchandising system according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0023] FIG. 6C is a partial front perspective view of a merchandising system according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0024] FIG. 7 is a partial front perspective view of a merchandising system according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0025] FIG. 8 is a partial front perspective view of a merchandising system according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0026] FIG. 9A is a side view of a divider engaged with a connector according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0027] FIG. 9B is a side view of a divider positioned above a shelf and connector according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0028] FIG. 10A is a partial top perspective view of a divider comprising an extender to engage a shelf according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0029] FIG. 10B is a partial top perspective view of a divider and an extender according to an exemplary embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0030] It is to be understood that the inventions are not limited to the details or methodology set forth in the following description or illustrated in the drawings. The inventions are capable of other embodiments or being practiced or carried out in various ways. It is also to be understood that the phraseology and terminology employed is for the purpose of description and should not be regarded as limiting.

[0031] Referring to the FIGURES, exemplary embodiments of a merchandising system are shown. The merchandising system may provide for display, space division, and orderly presentation of products. The merchandising system may provide for a selective size (shown as width) adjustment of a product display, "facing," cell, compartment, or display area, while not requiring the width adjustment of adjacent product displays, "facings," cells, compartments, or display areas. As shown in FIG. 1, a merchandising system 10 may provide a plurality of facings. Should a single facing need to be adjusted (for example, to accommodate a differently sized

product), that single facing may be readily adjusted without the need to resize any (or potentially all) of the remaining facings.

[0032] The merchandising system may further provide for modularity in the construction and assembly of the merchandising system. For example, product displays, “facings,” cells, compartments, or display areas may be added and/or removed to an existing merchandising system by reconfiguring the number and arrangement of dividers and connectors. The merchandising system may be a shelf system, shelf divider system, product facing tray system, product self-facing and organization tray system, divider system, shelf tray system, pusher system, dispensing system, tray system, etc. The merchandising system may be provided for use on a shelf (or any portion of a shelf), shelves, racks, displays, or other merchandising systems, or alternatively may be provided as a separate, independent merchandising system. According to other alternative embodiments, the system may be configured or oriented to provide for vertical size (e.g., height) adjustment.

[0033] According to an exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS. 1 through 3, a merchandising system 10 (e.g., grid system, tray system, shelf system, display system, case, divider system, storage system, modular system, etc.) comprises one or more dividers 12, located on a shelf system 13.

[0034] As shown in FIG. 1, shelf system 13 is provided for use with merchandising system 10. According to an exemplary embodiment shown in FIG. 1, shelf system 13 comprises a top portion 14 and a front portion 16. Referring to FIG. 1, shelf system 13 is configured to receive and support one or more dividers 12. According to an exemplary embodiment, top portion 14 may include one or more apertures 18 or rows of apertures to facilitate securing one or more dividers 12. The shelf portion may be of any size (e.g., length, width, height, etc.) or shape (e.g., rectangular, circular, octagonal, etc.). Shelf system 13 may be positioned parallel to the ground or sloped. According to various alternative embodiments, the shelf system may be secured to a wall or other means according to any suitable method.

[0035] Dividers 12 are shown in FIGS. 1 through 8. Dividers 12 comprise one or more base shown as a product support surface 22, panel section 24, pusher assembly 26, and front portion 28. Divider 12 (e.g., base, panel, divider, separator, division, partition, track, extrusion, channel, or other member, frame, support, guide, etc.) may be provided in a variety of configurations (e.g., varying size, shape, materials, orientation of parts, etc.).

[0036] Product support surface 22 is shown in FIGS. 1 through 5B. Product support surface 22 comprises a connector opening 30, one or more divider slots 32, and a pusher channel 34. According to an exemplary embodiment, product support surface 22 is configured to lay (e.g., rest) directly on a shelf (e.g., shelf system 13). The product support surface (e.g., tray, divider bottom, etc.) may be provided in a variety of configurations, shapes, and sizes. For example, product support surface 22 may include a variety of friction reducing ribs 23, friction inducing traction, or other product engaging means).

[0037] Referring to FIGS. 1 through 8, one or more dividers 12 may be provided for use with merchandising system 10. Dividers 12 provide space division, separation, organization, and merchandise variously sized products. Adjacent dividers 12 are coupled to one another with connectors 20. According to the exemplary embodiment shown in FIG. 1, merchandising

system 10 comprises one or more connectors 20 provided between adjacent dividers 12. Product support surface 22 utilizes an interface shown as connector opening 30 (e.g., cut-out, indentation, gap, cavity, recess, slot, etc.) to connect, coact, engage, or otherwise interface with connector 20 such that product surface 22 is provided on shelf system 13 in a substantially flat orientation (e.g., support surface 22 is not oriented at an angle relative to shelf system 13). According to the exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS. 2A through 5B and 8, connector 20 is integrally formed with product support surface 22. According to various exemplary embodiments, connector extensions may be used (e.g., a plurality of connectors may be connected together to form a longer connector thereby producing a wider space between dividers). According to various exemplary embodiments, the connector may be formed separately from the product support surface, the connector may be of various sizes and dimensions, etc.

[0038] Connector 20 (shown in FIGS. 1 through 5B and 8) may comprise a series of grooves 36 (e.g., notches, cuts, slots, combs, etc.). Grooves 36 (shown in FIGS. 2A, 3, 5A and 5B) may form a series of teeth (e.g., projections, extensions, etc.). According to various alternative embodiments, grooves 36 may be provided at any desired spacing, with connector 20 containing any desired number of grooves 36. According to the preferred embodiment, connector 20 and grooves 36 are configured to coact (e.g., receive, couple, engage or otherwise connect) with connector opening 30. To achieve this connection, the length, width, and depth of grooves 36 are configured approximately equal to that of connector opening 30. According to the preferred embodiment, and displayed in FIGS. 5A and 5B, connector 20, comprising grooves 36, and adjacent divider 12, comprising connector opening 30, are further configured to easily snap or press apart (e.g., lock, compress, slide, secure). In this manner, connector 20 and connector opening 30 are intended to provide for a secure yet modular and width-adjustable connection between a dividers 12 and adjacent dividers. As shown in FIG. 1, a series of two or more such divider connections may operate to create a width adjustable merchandising system 10 containing one or more product facings.

[0039] According to an exemplary embodiment, connector opening 30 (shown in FIGS. 2B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 10A and 10B) comprises a cutout or indentation in the bottom of product support surface 22 that substantially matches the size and shape of connector 20. In this manner, adjacent divider 12 and connector 20 may form a flat fit together. Referring to FIGS. 2B, 10A and 10B, connector opening 30 comprises a top edge 76 and side edges 78. The configuration allows groove 36 (shown in FIGS. 2A, 3, 5A, 5B, 8, 10A and 10B) to connectively engage cutout top edge 76. FIGS. 5B and 10B illustrate the fit formed when connector 20 is installed into adjacent opening 30 of divider 12. The fit formed by this configuration advantageously facilitates stable merchandising system 10 as the bottom of divider 12 rests flat against shelf top 14 while engaging connector 20. FIGS. 8 and 10A illustrate divider 12 positioned on shelf top 14. Merchandising system 10 may be constructed or assembled by pressing, snapping, engaging, placing, etc. the engaging portions of dividers 12 onto or with connectors 20. Connectors 20 provide for a relatively simple connection between two dividers 12. Dividers 12 shown in the FIGURES may be readily adjusted.

[0040] According to various exemplary embodiments, one or more connectors may be provided between adjacent divid-

ers. Providing a single connector 20 between adjacent dividers and near the front of divider 12, as shown in FIGS. 1; 5A and 5B, allows connector 20 to be easily accessed from the front of merchandising system 10, thereby allowing for relatively easy adjustments. According to an alternative embodiment, providing multiple connectors between adjacent dividers may provide for added stability between connected adjacent dividers. According to various exemplary embodiments, the connector may be provided in one or a variety of unit sizes (e.g., length, width, or height) or shapes (e.g., orthogonal, diagonal, triangular, or curved). According to an exemplary embodiment, the connector has a length of approximately 4.0 inches. According to other exemplary embodiments, the connector has a length of 6.0 to 8.0 inches. The connector may be provided in a variety of (or may be “field-cut” to) lengths or sizes which allow for the connectivity and/or interface with a variety of dividers.

[0041] According to an exemplary embodiment, divider slots 32 (as shown in FIGS. 2A, 3 and 4A) may allow for further divider or “facing” width adjustment by selectively receiving one or more panel section 24. Divider slots 32 allow panel section 24 to snap into the product support surface 22 at varying locations.

[0042] Panel section 24 comprises panel surface 40 (e.g., plane, side, divider, etc.) and one or more tabs 42 (e.g., projection, portion, member, connector, etc.). Panel section 24 may be snapped or pushed in and out of divider slots 32 to install or adjust panel section 24. When installed, panel section 24 is coupled to product support surface 22 along divider slots 32, secured by tabs 42. As shown in FIGS. 2A, 3, and 4A, in an exemplary embodiment the product support surface 22 comprises multiple divider slots 32, allowing for width adjustment of the panel surface 40 between dividers 12. FIGS. 5A and 5B show panel section 24 installed into the left-most divider slot 32. For smaller products (requiring less space between panel sections), the panel section could be detached from the left-most divider slot and installed in a divider slot closer to the center of the product support surface.

[0043] According to the exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS. 1 through 4A, product support surface 22 may further comprise a pusher channel 34 (which may be a slot, track, guide, pusher track, etc.) for receiving a pusher 44 or other product biasing mechanism. It should be noted that the various embodiments of the merchandising system shown may be used with any type of panel or divider sections (or partitions), including merchandising systems that do not employ pushers or product biasing mechanisms. According to another exemplary embodiment, the pusher channel may be omitted. According to yet other exemplary embodiments, the pusher channel may be provided in locations other than the product support surface, such as the panel section or another member not displayed. The pusher channel may be “pinched off,” otherwise reduced down in size, stopped, or terminated toward the back of the divider in order to prevent the pusher from being pushed too far back or out of the channel.

[0044] According to an exemplary embodiment (shown in FIG. 1 through 2B), pusher channel 34 is provided along the length of product support surface 22 of divider 12. Channel 34 is used to provide for the movement and guidance of pusher 44. As shown in FIGS. 1 through 5B, 7 and 8, pusher 44 (e.g., pusher paddle, pusher face, etc.) may comprise a face 45 and flange 46. Pusher 44 may be used for pressing, pushing, moving, or urging product forward toward front portion 28 of divider 12. Flanges 46 (e.g., flange, guide, rails, tracks, etc.)

are configured to fit in pusher channel 34 to facilitate stable sliding or moving of pusher 44 along pusher channel 34. The pusher may be provided with indicia (e.g., on the face) and may be provided in a variety of sizes, shapes, colors (e.g., clear), and materials to suit the application (e.g., product size).

[0045] As further shown in FIGS. 2A and 2B, pusher assembly 26 may include a biasing element 48. According to the exemplary embodiment shown in FIG. 2A, biasing element 48 comprises a coil spring. Pusher 44 is configured, through the use of biasing element 48, to automatically advance or urge forward product which is to be displayed. The coiled portion of biasing element 48 is provided on the back side of pusher 44 so that when pusher 44 is retracted (e.g., pulled toward the back of divider 12) biasing element 48 will bias pusher 44 in a forward direction.

[0046] FIGS. 1 through 5B, 7 and 8 show front portion 28. Front portion 28 acts to provide a face (e.g., wall, plate, lens, retainer, stop, display, etc.) against which product (not shown) may rest and settle against the force provided by biasing element 48. In this manner, front portion 28 resists pusher 44 from pushing product out of merchandising system 10.

[0047] Referring to FIGS. 2A and 2B, front portion 28 may include one or more clips 52 (e.g., tab, extrusion, hook, members, etc.) or protrusions which fit into openings 54 on product support surface 22. Front portion 28 may be generally a flat panel (as shown in FIGS. 1 through 5B). Alternative embodiments may include front portions of differing sizes, shapes, and configurations. For example, the dimensions of upper portion of the front portion may be increased or decreased to accommodate products of differing size. The divider may be further adjusted to accommodate new products by detaching some front portions and attaching new front portions. According to an alternative embodiment, the front portion may be configured to be attached to a shelf rather than a product support surface. According to other alternative embodiments, the front portion may be configured to interface with the divider at a variety of locations. According to an exemplary embodiment, the front portion is constructed from a transparent (clear) material. According to various exemplary embodiments, the front portion may be constructed from a variety of materials having different colors and opacity. According to various exemplary embodiments, the front portion may act as a product stop at the front of the dividers and merchandising system and may also act as a graphic panel, pricing guide, and/or other display.

[0048] According to an exemplary embodiment, as shown in FIGS. 1 through 3, and 6A through 8, divider 12 is configured to attach or secure to shelf top portion 14 using a member shown as a pin 56 (e.g., member, projection, tab, hook, peg, clip, lock, latch, etc.) which is coupled to divider 12 by an interface shown as a pin sleeve 58 (e.g., interface, connector, groove, slot, channel, etc.). Pin sleeve 58 extends from product support surface 22, as shown in FIGS. 1 through 3, and 6A through 8. According to an exemplary embodiment, pin sleeve 58 comprises a U-shaped extension configured to receive pin 56. According to an exemplary embodiment, pin 56 comprises an L-shaped rod or peg. As shown in FIGS. 1 through 3, and 6A through 8, pin 56 comprises a portion 60 that is slidably received within sleeve 58 and a portion 62 that is inserted into and/or received in apertures 18 provided on shelf system 13. Divider 12 may be secured to shelf portion 14 by snapping and/or sliding portion 60 into pin sleeve 58 and

inserting portion 62 into a shelf aperture 18. According to an exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS. 6A through 6C, portion 60 is snapped into engagement with sleeve 58. Once portion 60 has been snapped into sleeve 58, pin 56 is free to rotate about its longitudinal axis (e.g., along the length of sleeve 58). As shown in FIG. 6B, pin 56 comprises tabs or projections 102. Projections 102 allow pin 56 to rotate freely within sleeve 58, but provide resistance against removal of pin 56 from sleeve 58 by sliding pin 56 in a direction along the longitudinal axis of pin 56 (e.g., lengthwise along portion 60). As shown in FIGS. 6A through 6C, pin 56 is configured to rotate between a plurality of positions when inserted in sleeve 58. FIG. 6C illustrates pin 56 inserted into aperture or opening 104 formed in divider 12. Pin 56 may be positioned within opening 104 when divider 12 is placed on a shelf system that does not include apertures or does not provide apertures of an appropriate size or location for insertion of pin 56. According to various exemplary embodiments, the pins may rest within apertures on shelves, may be inserted into apertures (of varying sizes), may snap-fit into apertures, may engage apertures, etc. According to various exemplary embodiments, any number of suitable fasteners may be used to couple the dividers to a shelf (e.g., bolts, nails, Christmas tree fasteners, screws, etc.).

[0049] According to an exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS. 9A and 9B, divider 12 comprises an extension 70 (e.g., spacer, guide, backing, member, frame extension, divider extension, base extension, slide, sizing mechanism, connector, positioning device, etc.). Extension 70 is configured to provide additional support to the divider and merchandising system. Extension 70, as shown in FIGS. 9A and 9B, comprises a back portion 72. Pusher channel 34 of product support surface 22 may receive extension 70. Extension 70 and channel are configured to allow extension 70 to slidably (e.g., movably) connect to channel 34. Extension 70 may be slid (e.g., adjusted) to match the length of shelf system 13. According to an exemplary embodiment, extension 70 is configured to temporarily lock (e.g., secure) into channel 34. According to an exemplary embodiment, as shown in FIGS. 9A and 9B, back portion 72 (e.g., support, member, stop, etc.) is configured to engage a back edge 82 of shelf 13. The slidable nature of extension 70 and the capability of back portion 72 to engage shelf 13 allows extension 70 to provide additional support to the divider 12 and merchandising system 10.

[0050] According to an exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS. 9A and 9B, back portion 72 comprises a lower portion 74 and upper portion 76. Lower portion 74 is configured to contact (e.g., engage) back edge 82 of shelf 13. Extension 70 is preferably moved backward toward back edge 82 of shelf 13 until lower portion 74 of extension 70 engages back edge 82 of shelf 13 according to a suitable configuration. Divider 12 and/or merchandising system 10 are prevented from moving in various undesired directions when lower portion 74 is positioned securely along back edge 82 of shelf 13. According to an exemplary embodiment, back portion 72 may also be configured to engage a wall or other structure to prevent movement of divider 12 and system 10. When force is applied to divider 12 toward the back of system 10, back portion 72 provides resistance against a wall or other structure.

[0051] According to an exemplary embodiment, and shown in FIGS. 9A and 9B, extension 70 may further comprise one or more protrusions 88 to effectuate temporary locking of extension 70 in channel 34. According to an exemplary embodiment, channel 34 comprises indentions or apertures

90. Protrusions 88 of extension 70 may fit apertures 90 of product support surface 22. Extension 70 may slide into channel 34 until a desired protrusion 88 aligns within a desired aperture 90 of channel 34. Protrusions 88 may be flexible and snap into aperture 90 when properly aligned. Once protrusion 88 is snapped into aperture 90, extension 70 may be temporarily locked in place. The temporary locking of protrusion 88 allows extension 70 to extend a certain set distance from the back of divider 12. According to various exemplary embodiments, the extension may be adjustable according to any suitable shelf size and/or distance between the divider and a back shelf edge or other support structure (e.g., a back wall).

[0052] According to an exemplary embodiment, in order to move extension 70 relative to divider 12 and channel 34, a protrusion 88 that is positioned within aperture 90 of channel 34 may be depressed (e.g., pushed downward toward the slot) so that the upper surface of protrusion 88 fits within the hollow opening of channel 34. Extension 70 may then be moved to a new location as desired until another protrusion 88 snaps up into aperture 90. This process may be repeated as necessary to effectively secure divider 12 and/or merchandising system 10 to shelf 13. According to other exemplary embodiments, any suitable means or method of temporarily locking the extension portion may be used.

[0053] According to an exemplary embodiment, upper portion 76 of back portion 72 may restrict the movement of articles and/or prevent pusher 44 from moving beyond the back of divider 12. Upper portion 76 may stop articles or products and/or biasing element 48 from further movement as they are urged backwards along channel 34. Because extension 70 is preferably “locked” in place by aperture 90 in channel 34 and protrusion 88 on extension 70, extension 70 may effectively stop articles and/or products with little movement of extension 70 or divider 12. According to various alternative embodiments, any suitable configuration for the extension may be used. According to various alternative embodiments, the merchandising system may be used without an extension member.

[0054] As shown in the FIGURES, merchandising system 10 is intended to provide dividers 12 that may be selectively adjusted. Products or merchandise may be placed between adjacent dividers 12. Pusher 44 may be positioned to the rear of divider 12 when fully stocked with products. As products are removed from merchandising system 10, pusher 44 pushes the remaining product toward the front of divider 12 and shelf 13. The pusher assembly is not required for use in various exemplary embodiments, which may be used in conjunction with other shelving divider arrangements (such as basic wall dividers).

[0055] Merchandising system 10 shown in the FIGURES allows dividers 12 to be reconfigured and resized for different sized divisions without the need to reconfigure or resize adjacent dividers 12. A “facing” or cell may be resized or have its width changed without needing to resize adjacent areas. This is an advantageous feature for a situation where one facing or cell needs to be resized for a different product size, but adjacent facings do not need to be so resized.

[0056] According to various exemplary embodiments, the assemblies and components of the merchandising system may be constructed from a variety of suitable materials, including metals, metal alloys, aluminum, polymers, composites, plastics (including high impact plastics, injection molded plastic, extruded plastic, etc.), ceramics, etc. Using

plastic offers several advantages including that the pieces may be constructed in a variety of different colors, surface finishes, textures, etc.

[0057] Merchandising system **10** may be placed on top of shelves **13** or shelving units. Merchandising system **10** may simply rest on the top of a surface (e.g., shelf top portion **14**). According to exemplary embodiments, low-bond adhesives, soft-tack adhesives, plastics, polymers, elastomers, rubber (including craton rubber), other friction enhancing materials, etc. may be applied to restrict the motion of the merchandising system in addition to the use of the pins.

[0058] It is important to note that the construction and arrangement of the elements of the merchandising system as shown in the detailed description is illustrative only. Although only a few embodiments of the merchandising system have been described in detail in this disclosure, those skilled in the art who review this disclosure will readily appreciate that many modifications are possible (e.g., variations in sizes, dimensions, structures, shapes, tolerances, and proportions of the various elements, values of parameters, mounting arrangements, use of materials, colors, orientations, etc.) without materially departing from the novel teachings and advantages of the subject matter of the present merchandising systems. For example, elements shown as integrally formed may be constructed of multiple parts or elements show as multiple parts may be integrally formed. For example, the connector may be formed separately from the divider according to various exemplary embodiments. The operation of the connection between elements of the merchandising system may be reversed or otherwise varied, the shape or size (e.g., length or width) of the elements of the system (e.g., shelf divider or interface of the divider members) may be varied, the nature or number of discrete adjustment positions provided on the connectors may be varied (e.g., by variations in the number of engagement points or size of the engagement points or type of engagement), etc.

[0059] The elements and/or assemblies of the system may be constructed from any of a wide variety of materials that provide sufficient strength or durability, including any of a wide variety of moldable or extrudable plastic materials (such as high-impact plastic) in any of a wide variety of colors, textures and combinations. The merchandising system may be used in association with a shelf (e.g., of a shelving unit or the like) or any of a wide variety of other surfaces in any of a wide variety of other applications. Accordingly, all such modifications are intended to be included within the scope of the present inventions.

[0060] The merchandising system may be configured to display and merchandise a variety of products, including containers, packages, bags, boxes, tubes, etc. The products may be food products, foodstuffs, snacks, prepared food packages, etc. According to various exemplary embodiments, other products of a variety of sizes and weights may be displayed and merchandised, such as consumer products, parts, batteries, automotive batteries, tissue boxes, etc.

[0061] The order or sequence of any process or method steps may be varied or re-sequenced according to alternative embodiments. In the claims, any means-plus-function clause is intended to cover the structures described herein as performing the recited function and not only structural equivalents but also equivalent structures. Other substitutions, modifications, changes and omissions may be made in the design, operating conditions and arrangement of the pre-

ferred and other exemplary embodiments without departing from the spirit of the present inventions.

what is claimed is:

1. A merchandising system comprising:

a first base comprising a front, a back, a horizontal surface and at least one vertical panel;

a member configured to couple the first base to a shelf system; and

an interface coupling the member to the first base;

wherein the member is configured to be provided in a first position so that the member engages the shelf system thereby coupling the first base to the shelf system; and wherein the member is configured to be provided in a second position so that the member is in a stowed position.

2. The merchandising system of claim **1** wherein the member comprises a pin configured to be inserted into an aperture formed in a shelf surface.

3. The merchandising system of claim **2** wherein the pin is configured to be held in place in the aperture by a friction-fit.

4. The merchandising system of claim **2** wherein the pin is configured to fit loosely within the aperture.

5. The merchandising system of claim **1** wherein the base comprises an opening for stowing the member so that the member does not engage the shelf system when in the stowed position.

6. The merchandising system of claim **1** wherein the member is configured to rotate between the first position and the second position.

7. The merchandising system of claim **1** wherein the first base further comprises a first interface and a first connector, and further comprising a second base having a second interface and a second connector;

wherein the first connector releasably couples to the second interface;

wherein a compartment of a first size is provided when the first interface is coupled to a first portion of the second connector;

wherein a compartment of a second size is provided when the first interface is coupled to a second portion of the second connector; and

wherein at least one base comprises a pusher for advancing articles.

8. The merchandising system of claim **7** wherein the first connector comprises at least two grooves and the second connector comprises at least two grooves.

9. The merchandising system of claim **7** wherein the first base further comprises a member configured to couple a rear portion of the first base to the shelf system.

10. The merchandising system of claim **7** wherein the first interface of the first base comprises a recess configured to engage the second connector.

11. A merchandising system for articles comprising:

a first track comprising a horizontal surface having a first interface and a second interface provided on the horizontal surface;

a second track comprising a horizontal surface having a third interface and a fourth interface provided on the horizontal surface;

a first vertical panel having a first protrusion; and

a second vertical panel having a second protrusion;

wherein the first track further comprises a connector that releasably couples the first track to the second track;

wherein a compartment of a first size is provided when the first protrusion of the first vertical panel is coupled to the first interface of the first track and the second protrusion of the second vertical panel is coupled to the third interface of the second track; and

wherein a compartment of a second size is provided when the first protrusion of the first vertical panel is coupled to the second interface of the first track and the second protrusion of the second vertical panel is coupled to the third interface of the second track.

12. The merchandising system of claim **11** wherein the protrusions-fit within openings of the interfaces.

13. The merchandising system of claim **11** wherein the connector is integrally formed with the first track.

14. The merchandising system of claim **11** wherein the first protrusion is integrally formed with the first track and the second protrusion is integrally formed with the second track.

15. The merchandising system of claim **11** wherein the first track further comprises a pin configured to be received within an aperture provided on a shelf system to secure the first track to the shelf system.

16. The merchandising system of claim **11** wherein the second track further comprises an interface configured to engage one or more grooves provided on the connector.

17. A merchandising system for articles comprising:

a first member having a first connector and a horizontal surface that comprises a series of apertures;

a second member having a second connector and a horizontal surface that comprises a series of apertures;

a first divider comprising a first protrusion configured to engage one of the series of apertures; and

a second divider comprising a second protrusion configured to engage one of the series of apertures;

wherein the first connector releasably couples the first member to the second member; and

wherein the first member comprises a pin configured to be inserted into an aperture provided on a shelf system to secure the first member to the shelf system.

18. The merchandising system of claim **17** wherein the series of apertures form rows of apertures.

19. The merchandising system of claim **17** wherein the first member further comprises a member configured to couple a rear portion of the first member to the shelf system.

20. The merchandising system of claim **17** wherein the first connector comprises a series of grooves and the second connector comprises a series of grooves.

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