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(54) **COLD BUFFET FOOD TRAY**

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(76) Inventor: **Jamelle Shaw**, Shoal Creek, AL  
(US)

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Correspondence Address:  
**BRADLEY ARANT BOULT CUMMINGS LLP**  
**INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY DEPARTMENT**  
**1819 FIFTH AVENUE NORTH**  
**BIRMINGHAM, AL 35203-2104 (US)**

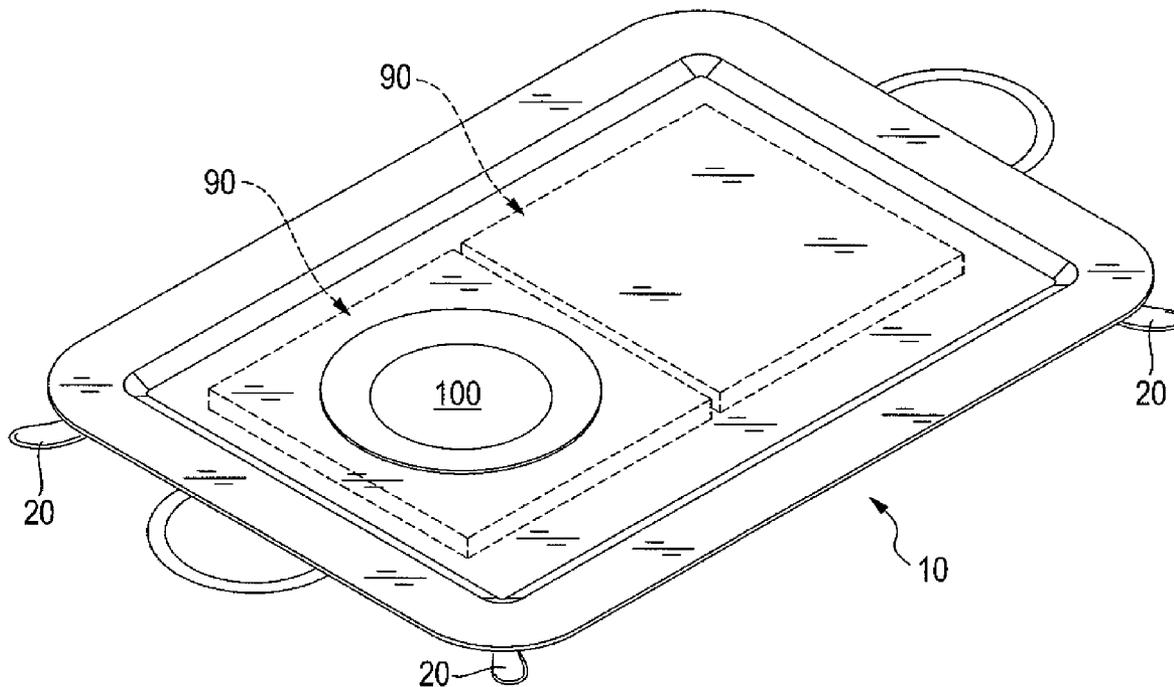
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

This invention relates generally to a food tray designed to keep food cold while being served. More specifically, but without limitation, the invention is directed toward a raised buffet food tray with a refrigeration compartment capable of receiving at least one cooling pack and accessible without lifting or removing the food tray.

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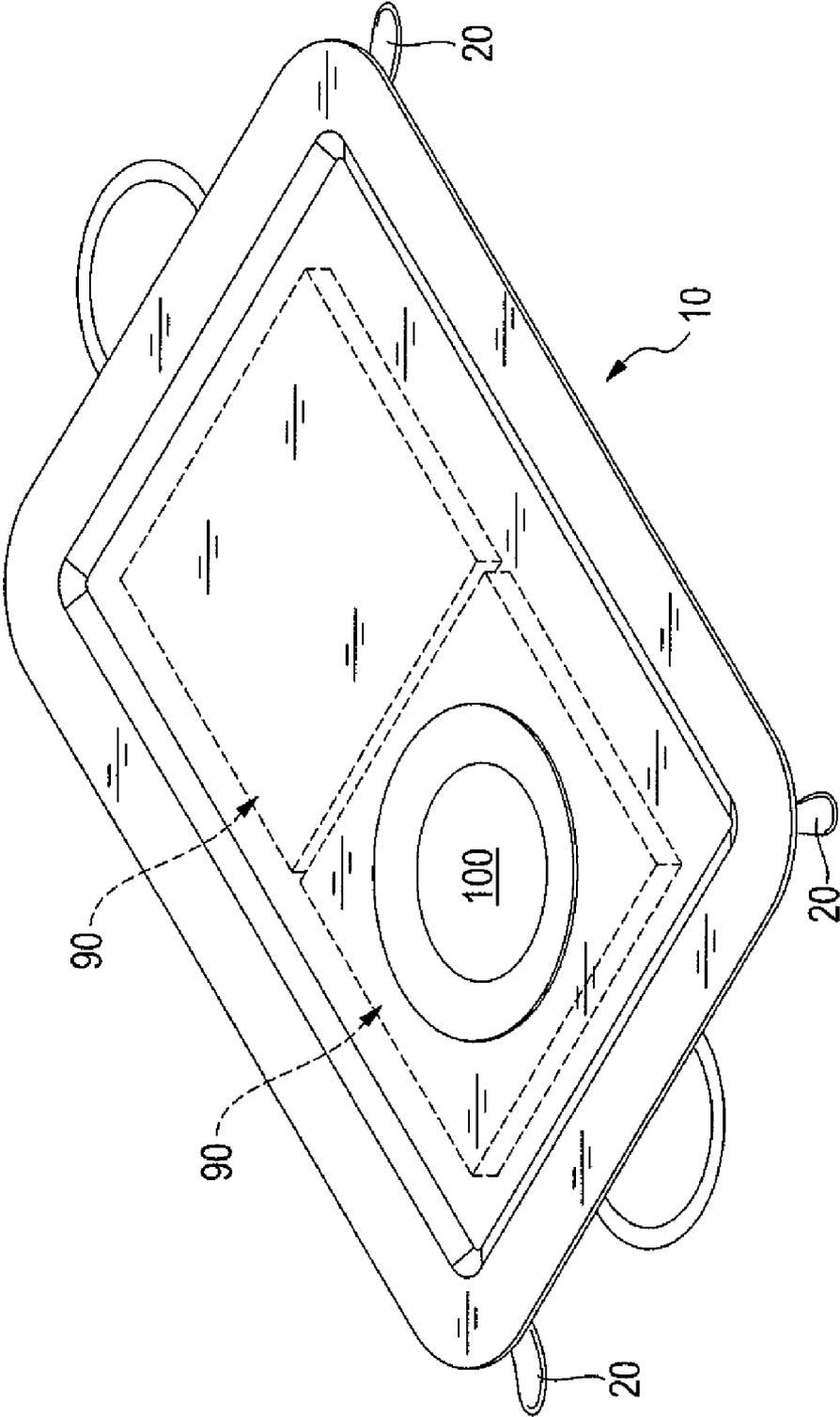


FIG. 1

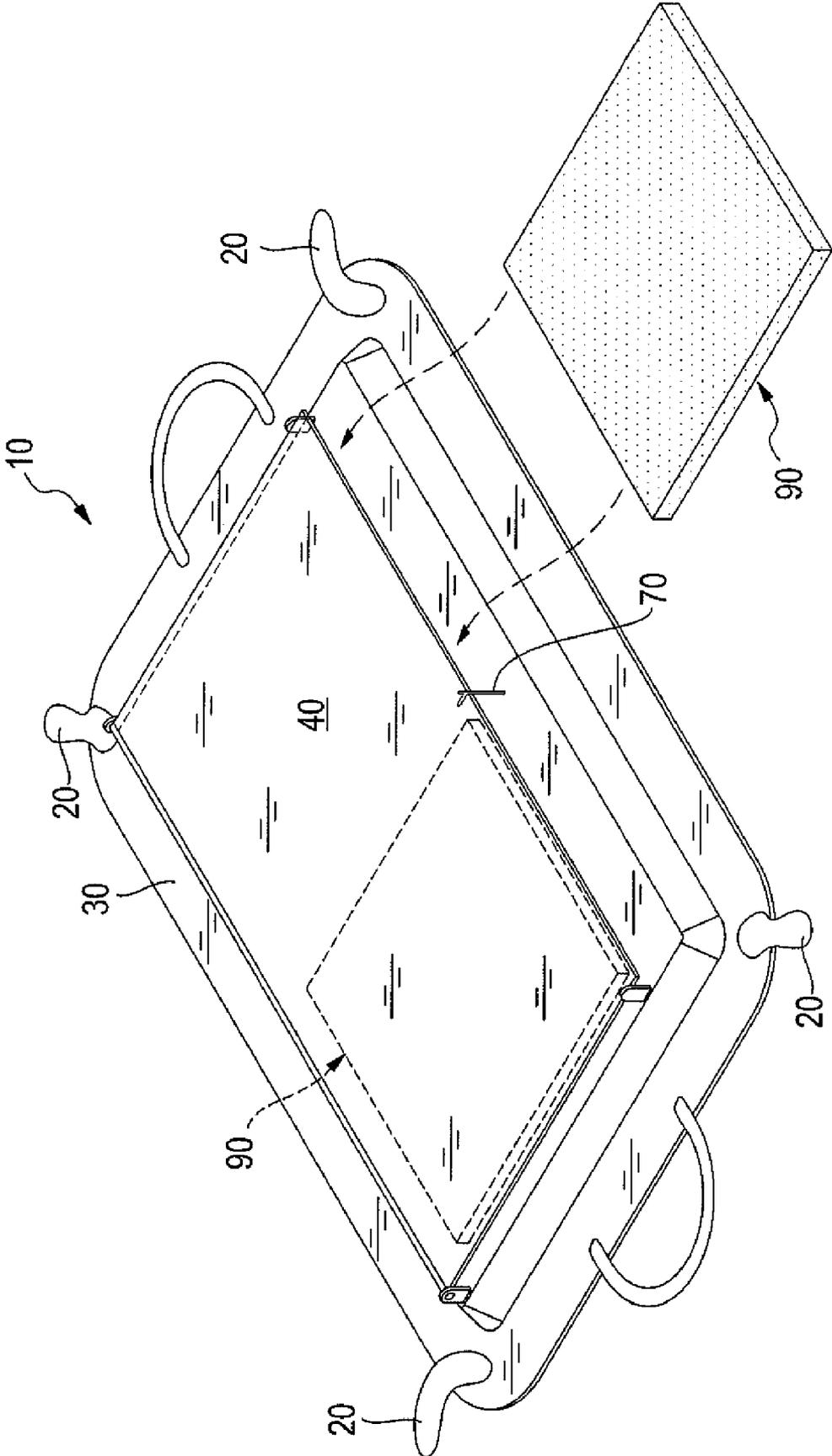


FIG. 2

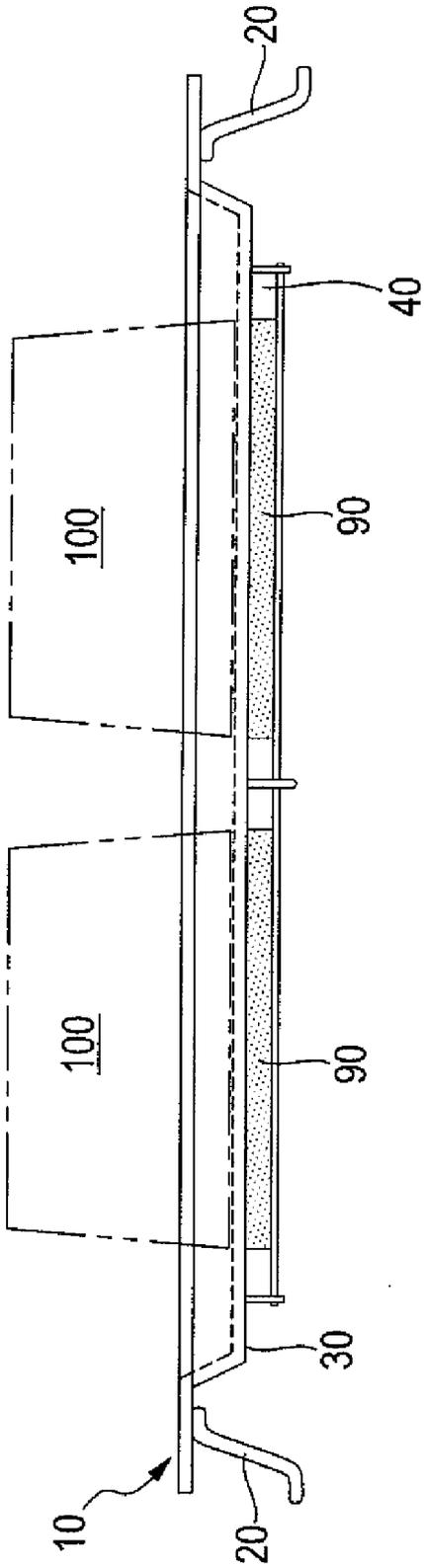


FIG. 3

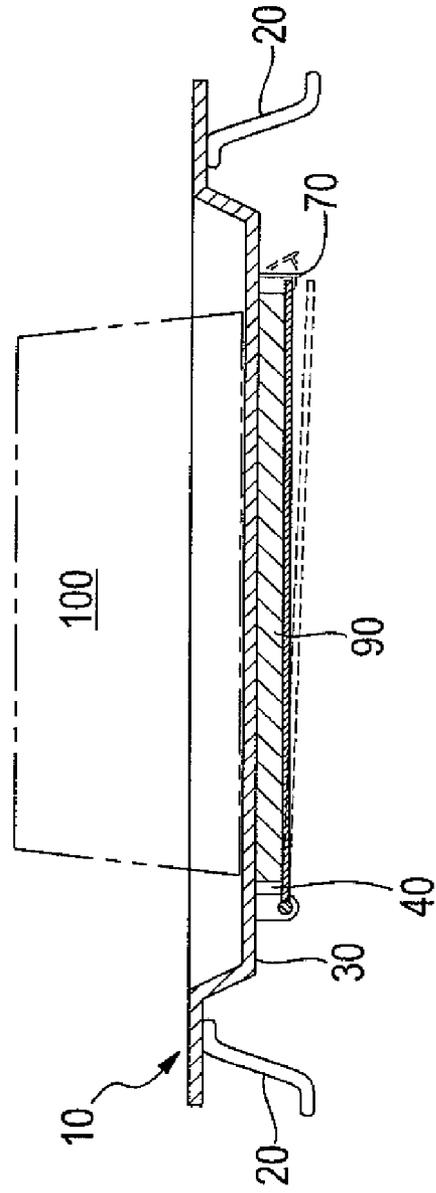


FIG. 4

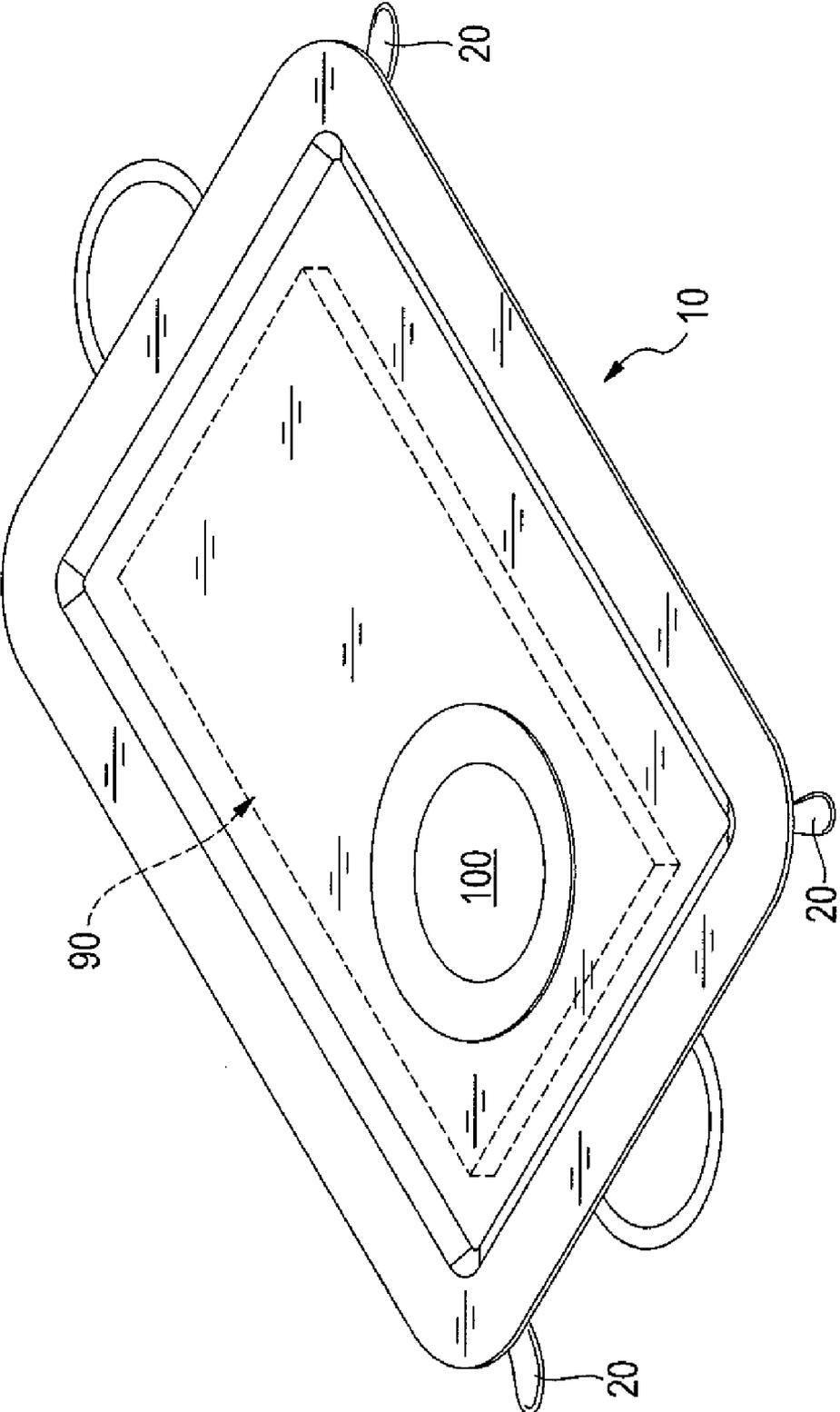


FIG. 5

## COLD BUFFET FOOD TRAY

### BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

#### [0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] This invention relates generally to a food tray designed to keep food cold while being served. More specifically, but without limitation, the invention is directed toward a buffet food tray with a refrigeration compartment accessible without lifting or removing the food tray.

#### [0003] 2. Description of Related Art

[0004] In the food service business, buffet food trays are commonly used to serve food. Typically, food is kept hot in a buffet food tray by using a small flame or other heating means under the tray. However, if food is to be served cold rather than hot, the options available are to serve the food at room temperature, set the buffet food tray in ice, or set the tray in a second container with ice packs or some other coolant.

[0005] Setting a buffet food tray in ice is messy and an unattractive presentation. Over time, the ice melts and the tray must be removed from the ice in order to replace the melted ice. Similarly, if the tray is placed in a second container with some other coolant such as ice packs, the food tray and second container must be separated in order to replace the ice packs. Not only does this disrupt the flow of people through the buffet line, but it can create a mess around the buffet food tray. Thus, a buffet food tray designed to keep food cold without requiring that the food tray be lifted or moved is needed.

### BRIEF SUMMARY

[0006] This invention relates to a buffet food tray designed to keep food cold while being served in a table, buffet line, or similar setting without requiring the food tray be lifted or moved to replenish the cold supply. In an embodiment of the present invention, the food tray is footed, or otherwise raised, so that the underside of the tray does not rest on the table or other supporting surface such as a cabinet or floor. The food tray contains a refrigeration compartment that is coupled to the underside of the tray and that is capable of receiving at least one cooling pack. The refrigeration compartment may be accessible by any closable access means such as a hinged door or drawer. When the refrigeration is in an open configuration, one may place a cooling pack within the refrigeration compartment. When the refrigeration compartment is in a closed configuration, the cooling pack is held in the refrigeration compartment and against the underside of the tray thereby cooling the tray. The footed or raised tray allows the user to access the refrigeration compartment to change the cooling pack without having to lift or move the food tray.

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] FIG. 1 is a top perspective view of an embodiment of the present invention.

[0008] FIG. 2 is a bottom perspective view of an embodiment of the present invention.

[0009] FIG. 3 is a front view of an embodiment of the present invention.

[0010] FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view of an embodiment of the present invention.

[0011] FIG. 5 is a perspective view of an embodiment of the present invention.

### DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0012] The following is a detailed exemplary description of an embodiment of the invention, in a number of its various aspects. Those skilled in the art will understand that the specificity provided herein is intended for illustrative purposes with respect to an exemplary embodiment, only, and is not to be interpreted as limiting the scope of the invention or claims.

[0013] This invention relates to a food tray **10** designed to keep food cold while being served without requiring the food tray **10** be lifted or moved to replenish the cold supply. In an embodiment of the present invention, the food tray **10**, which includes a substantially horizontal platter for holding foods, is raised by a support such that the underside **30** of the food tray **10** does not rest on a table. For purposes of this description, the term table is used to refer to any surface upon which the food tray may be placed, including but not limited to a table, buffet line, console, counter, floor, or other supporting surface. FIGS. 1-5 illustrate a particular embodiment of the invention in which a food tray **10** is supported by feet **20** on the underside of the tray **30**. The feet **20** serve to raise the tray **10** such that the underside of the tray **30** is accessible without physically lifting or moving the food tray **10**. The food tray **10** may be supported in any other method known in the art such as by a stand.

[0014] In an embodiment of the present invention, the food tray **10** contains a refrigeration compartment **40**. As shown in the Figures, the refrigeration compartment **40** is coupled to the underside **30** of the food tray **10** and has an open configuration and closed configuration. When in the open configuration, the refrigeration compartment is accessible for inserting or removing a cold pack. FIG. 4 illustrates a particular embodiment of the invention in which the refrigeration compartment **40** is accessible via a hinged door. A latch **70** is used to controllably maintain the hinged door in the open or closed configurations. In an alternative embodiment of the invention, the refrigeration compartment may be accessible via a drawer which may be moved from the open configuration to the closed configuration.

[0015] The footed, or otherwise raised, food tray **10** allows the user to access the refrigeration compartment **40** without lifting or moving the food tray **10**. This allows the cooling packs **90** to be easily and quickly replaced without making a mess or severely interrupting the food line. When the refrigeration compartment **40** is in the open configuration, cooling packs **90** may be placed in the refrigeration compartment **40**. Upon closing the refrigeration compartment **40**, the cooling packs **90** are held in the refrigeration compartment **40** and pressed against the underside **30** of the food tray **10**. Thus, the food tray **10** and the food **100** contained therein are cooled.

[0016] The refrigeration compartment **40** is capable of receiving at least one cooling pack **90**. In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 5, the refrigeration compartment **40** contains one cooling pack **90** that covers essentially the entire area under the food tray **10**. In various embodiments, the refrigeration compartment **40** may receive multiple cooling packs **90**. For example, using a food tray **10** configured to receive two foods **100**, the refrigeration compartment **40** likewise may receive two cooling packs **90** that correspond with the two foods **100** as illustrated in FIGS. 1, 2 and 3. Of course, it is not necessary that the number of cooling packs **90** cor-

respond with the number of foods **100** held by the food tray **10**. One cooling pack may be used with a food tray that serves more than one food.

What is claimed is:

**1.** A food tray for chilling food placed thereon for service from a table comprising:

a substantially horizontal platter for holding food;

a refrigeration compartment coupled to the underside of said platter, said refrigeration compartment having an open configuration and a closed configuration, wherein said open configuration is adapted to allow access to said compartment for inserting into or removing therefrom a cold pack and said closed configuration is adapted to maintain a cold pack in substantial contact with the underside of said platter; and,

a support fixed to the underside of the platter elevating said refrigeration compartment sufficiently above said table to allow access thereto when in said open configuration without having to lift said tray from said table.

**2.** The food tray of claim **1**, where the support is a plurality of feet.

**3.** The food tray of claim **1**, where the support is a stand.

**4.** The food tray of claim **1**, where the compartment comprises a hinged door that may be moved from the open configuration to the closed configuration, and a latch to controllably maintain said door in said open or closed configuration.

**5.** The food tray of claim **1**, where the compartment comprises a drawer that may be moved from the open configuration to the closed configuration.

**6.** A serving tray for chilling food placed thereon for service from a table comprising:

a substantially horizontal platter for holding food;

a refrigeration compartment coupled to the underside of said platter, said refrigeration compartment having closable access means adapted to allow access to said compartment for inserting into or removing therefrom a cold pack and to maintain a cold pack in substantial contact with the underside of said platter; and,

support means fixed to the underside of the platter elevating said refrigeration compartment sufficiently above said table to allow access thereto without having to lift said tray from said table.

**7.** The serving tray of claim **6**, where said support means is a plurality of feet.

**8.** The serving tray of claim **6**, where said support means is a stand.

**9.** The serving tray of claim **6**, where said closable access means comprises a hinged door that may be moved from an open configuration to a closed configuration, and a latch to controllably maintain said door in said open or closed configuration.

**10.** The serving tray of claim **6**, where said closable access means comprises a drawer that may be moved from an open configuration to a closed configuration, and a latch to controllably maintain said door in said open or closed configuration.

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