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(54) **CARRIER FOR CONTAINERS**

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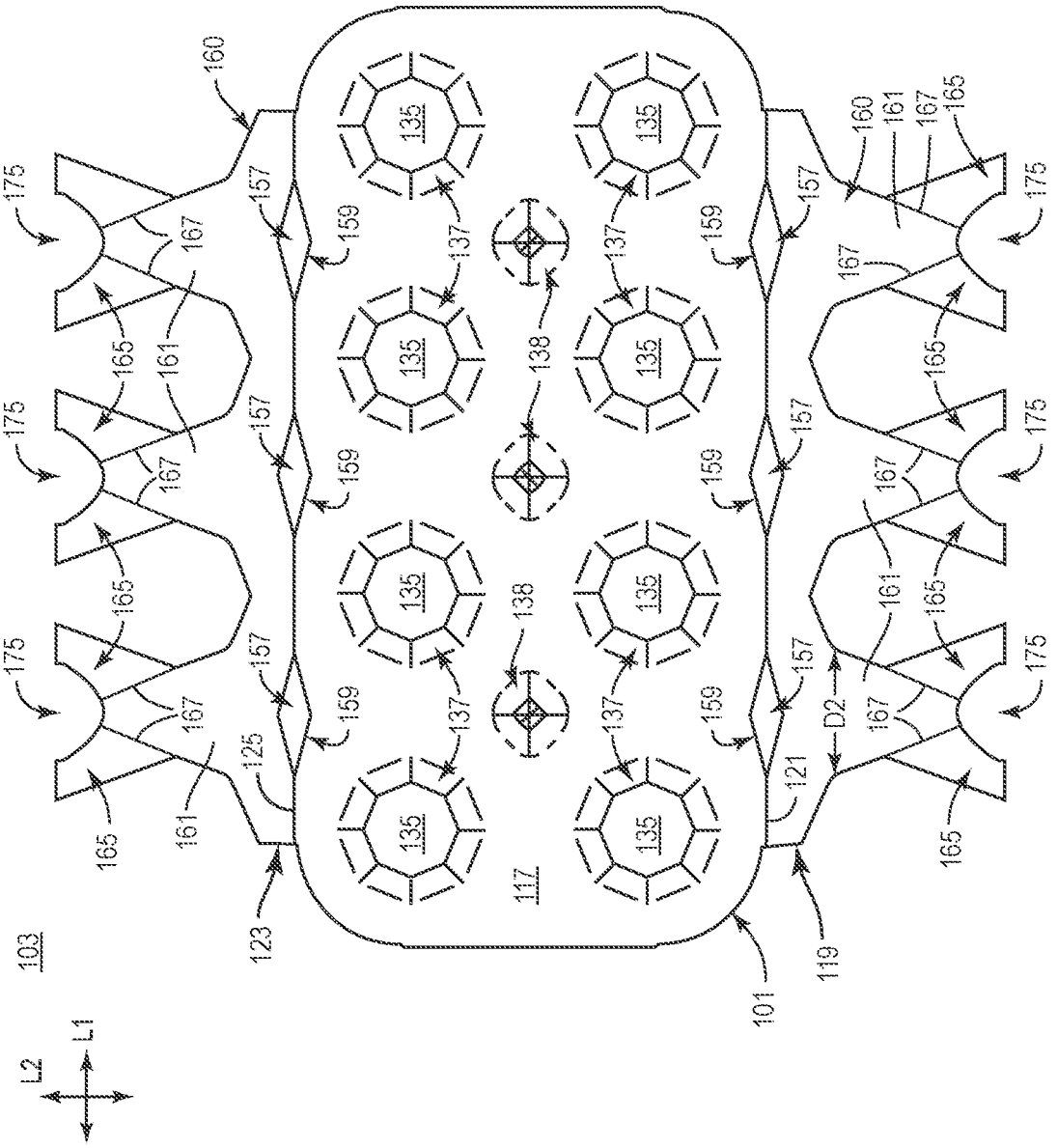
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A carrier for holding a plurality of containers, the carrier including a central panel including a plurality of container retention openings for at least partially receiving a respective container of the plurality of containers, at least one reinforcement flap foldably connected to the central panel at a fold line, the at least one reinforcement flap including a base portion and a plurality of spaced extents extending from the base portion for being positioned between respective containers of the plurality of containers, and at least one reinforcement feature interrupting the fold line and positioned between the central panel and the at least one reinforcement flap.


103
L2
L1
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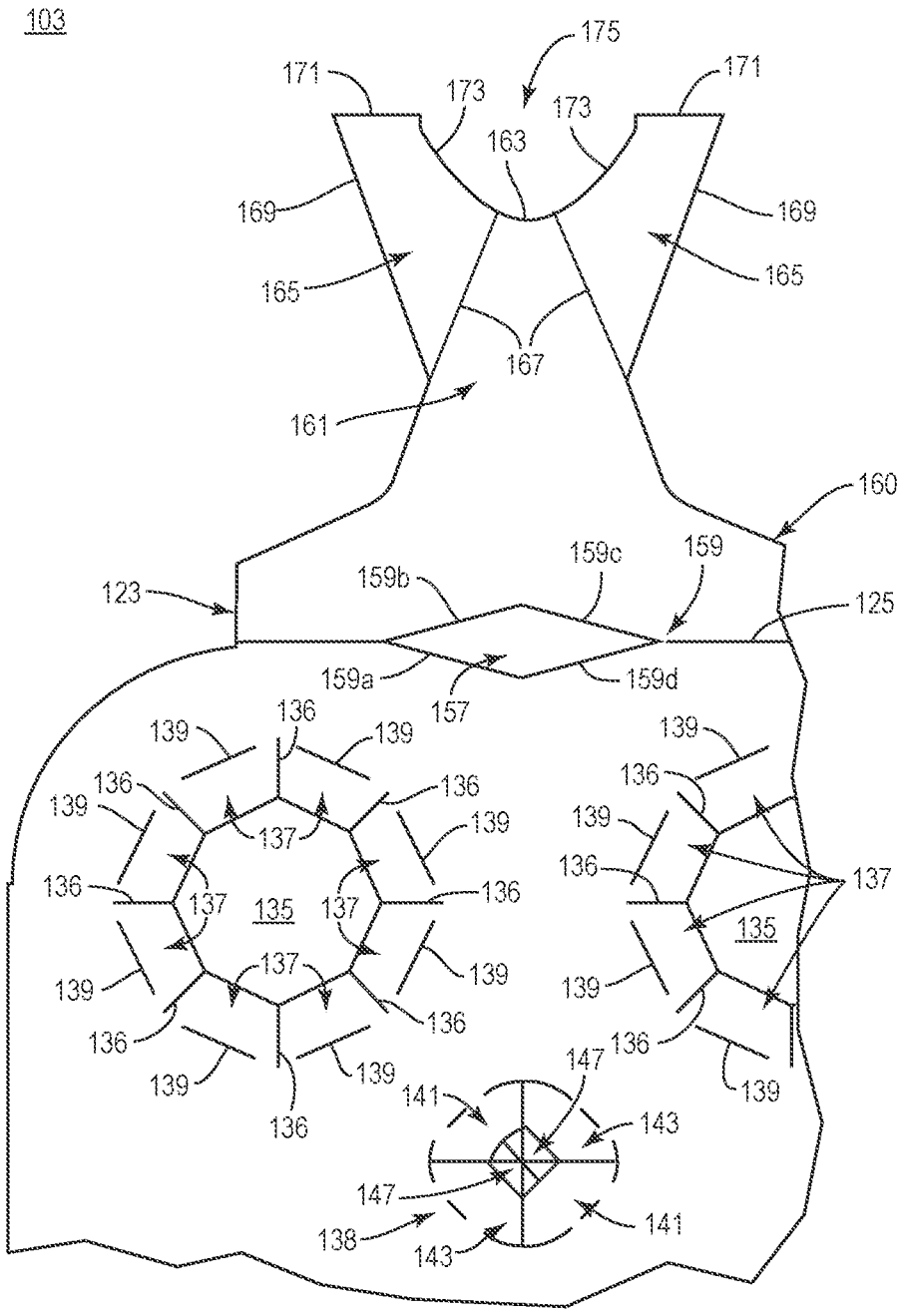
167
175
D2

FIG. 1


103
175
171
173
173
171
163
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165
165
167
161
160
159c
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159b
123
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159a
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159d
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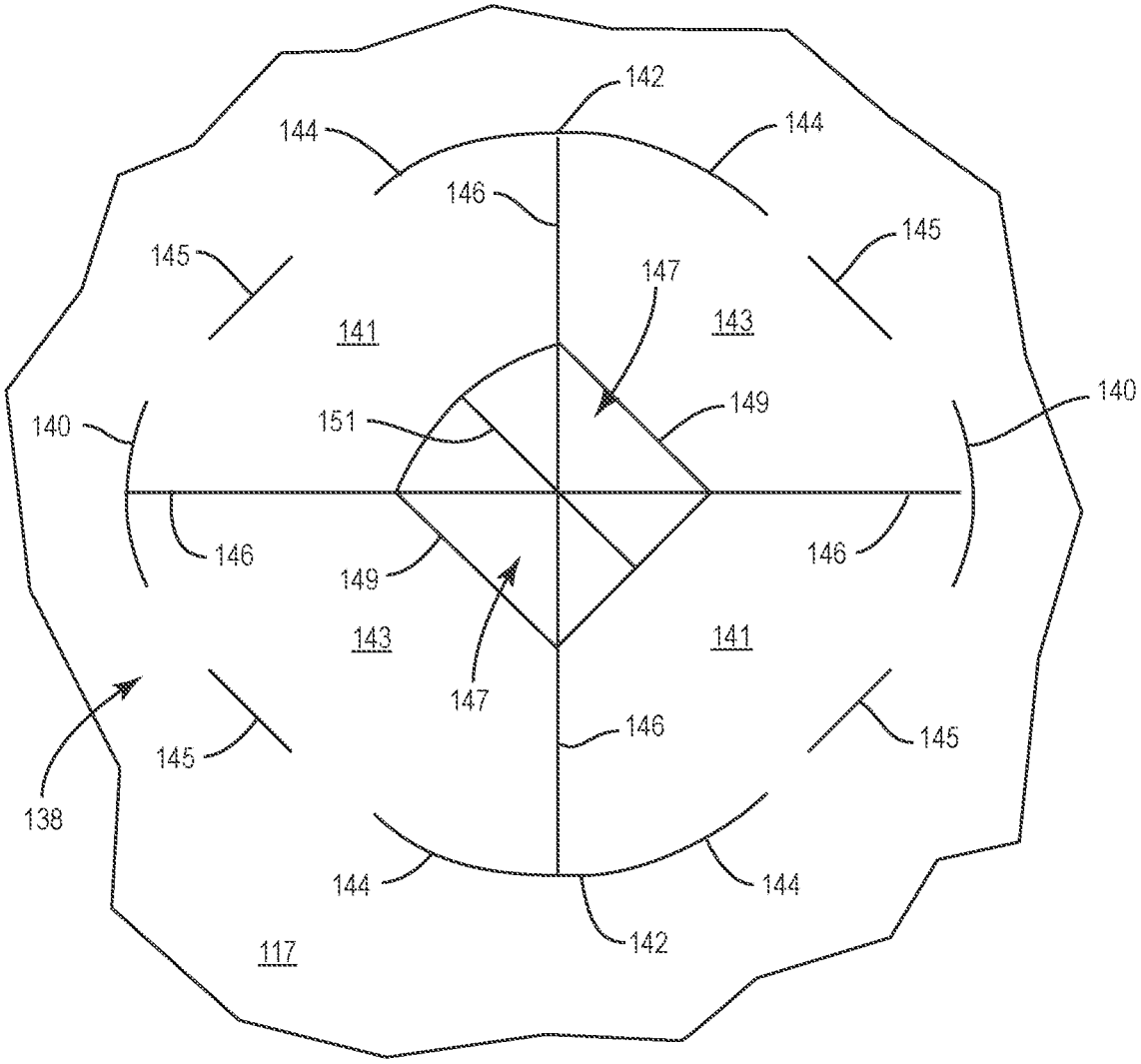
138

FIG. 1A


142
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147
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151
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138
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142
117

FIG. 1B

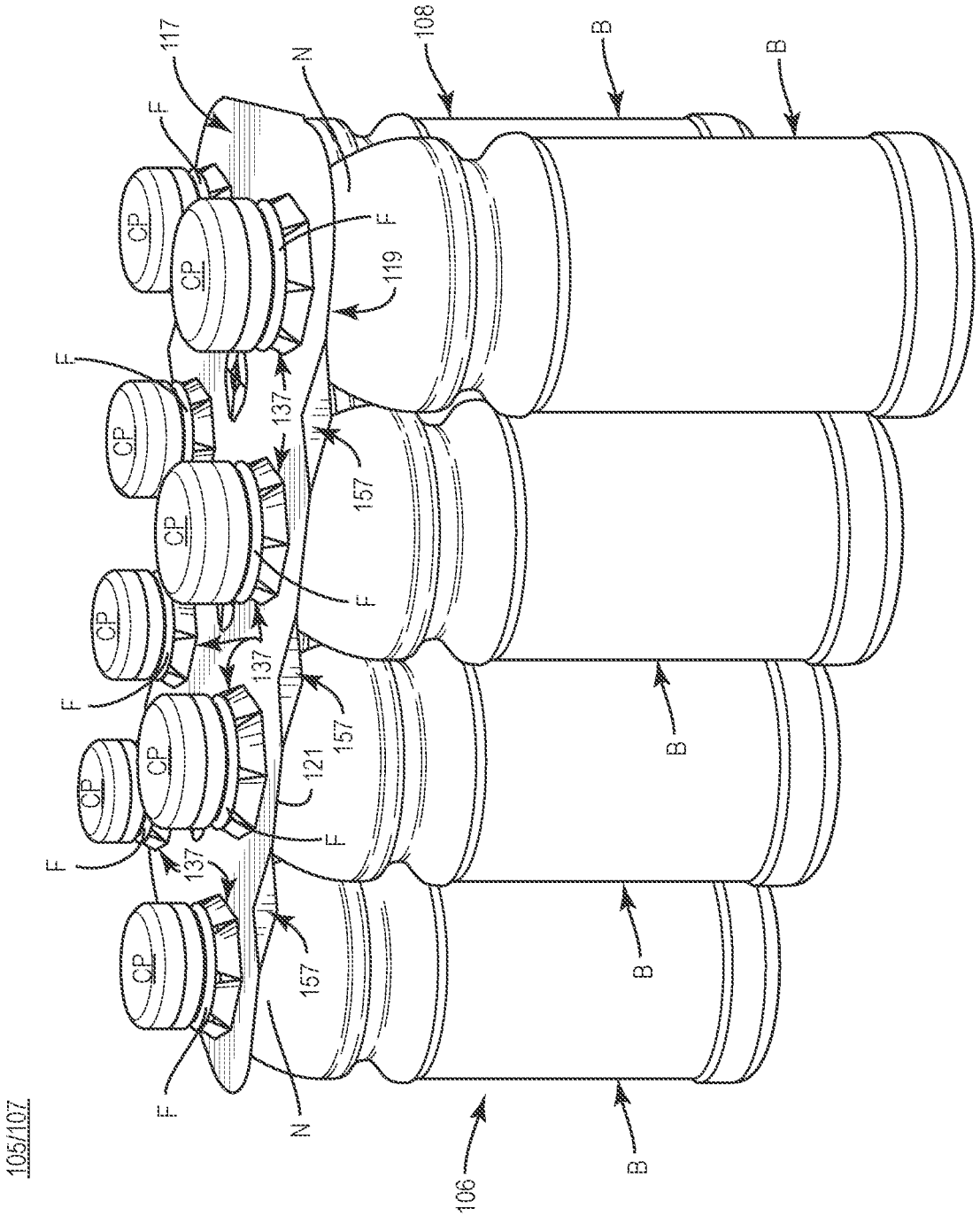


FIG. 2

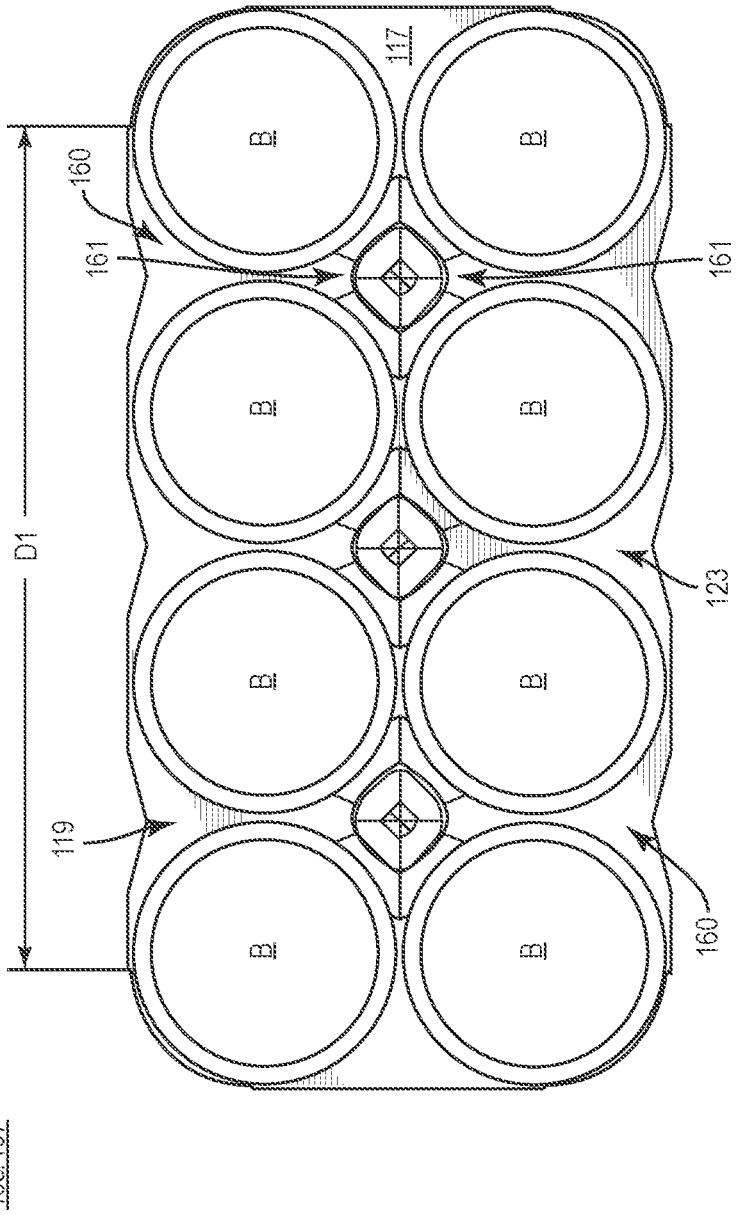


FIG. 3

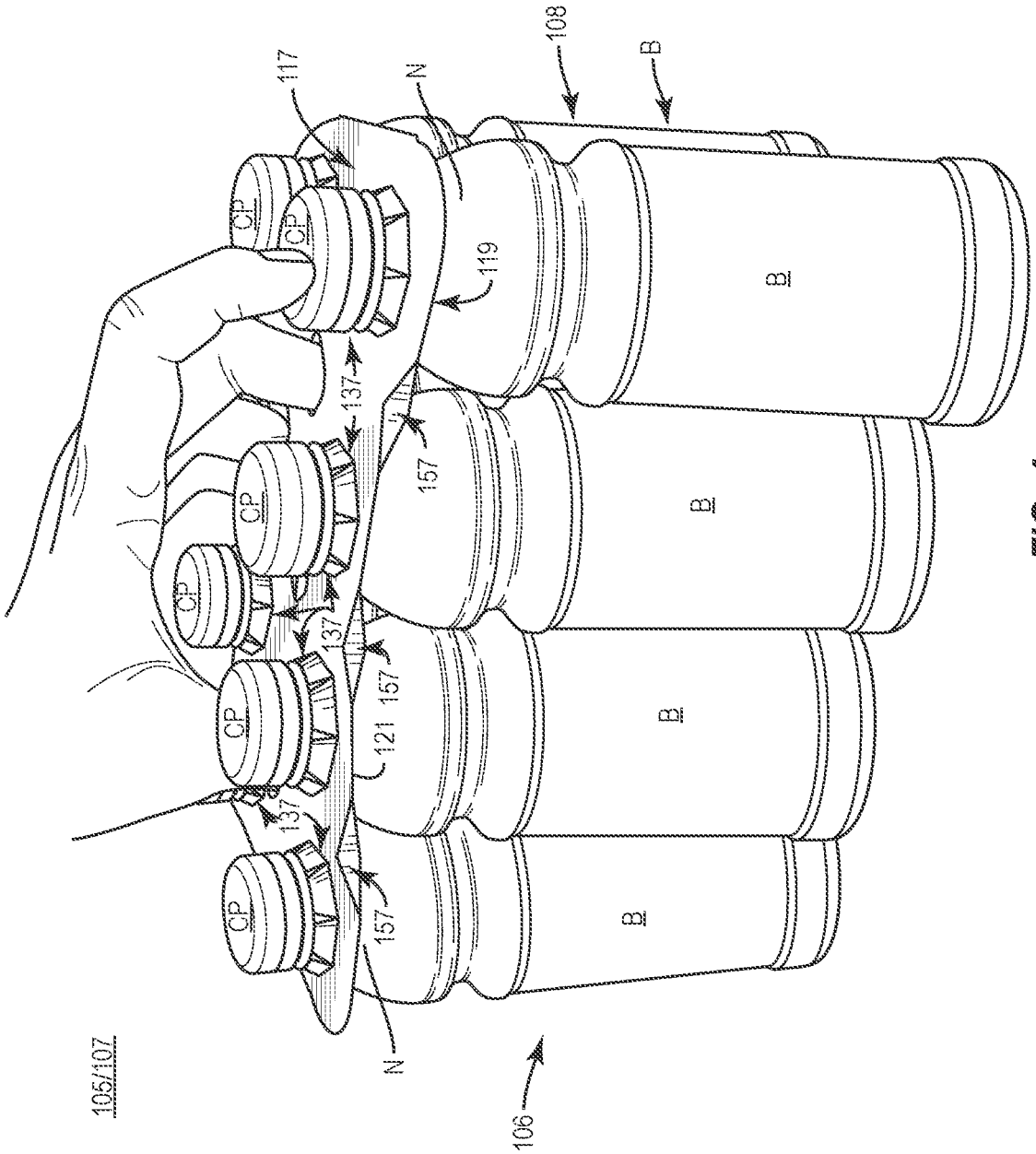
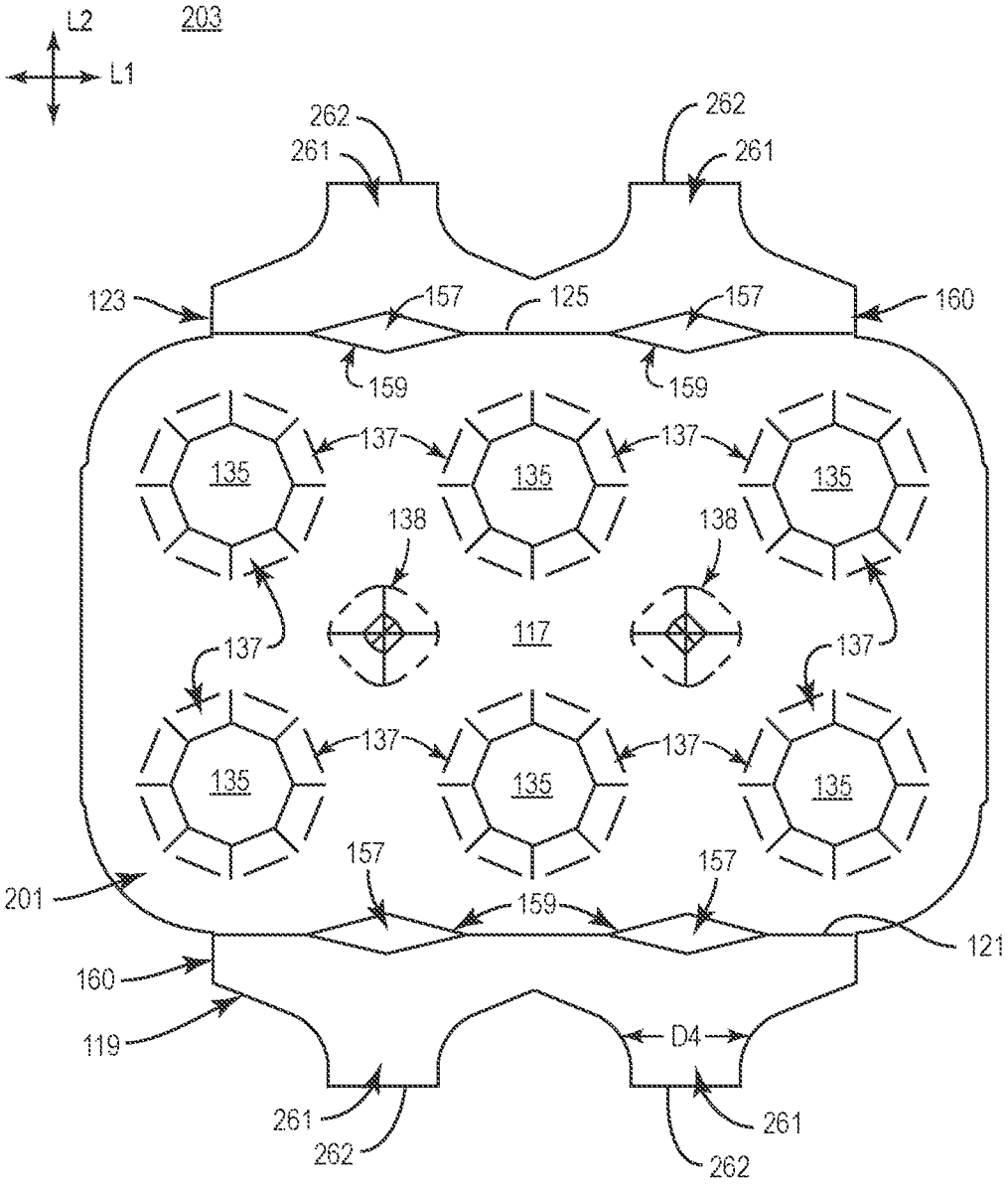


FIG. 4


L2
203
L1
262
261
262
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123
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135
138
138
117
137
137
135
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157
201
159
121
160
119
D4
261
261
262
262

FIG. 5

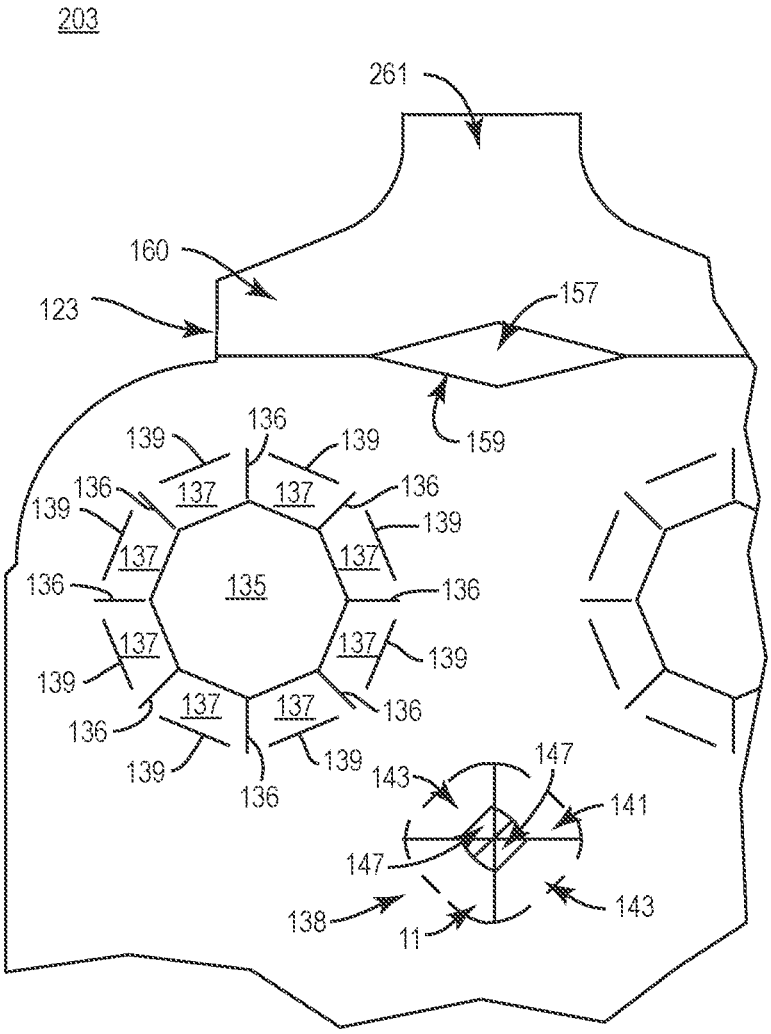


FIG. 5A

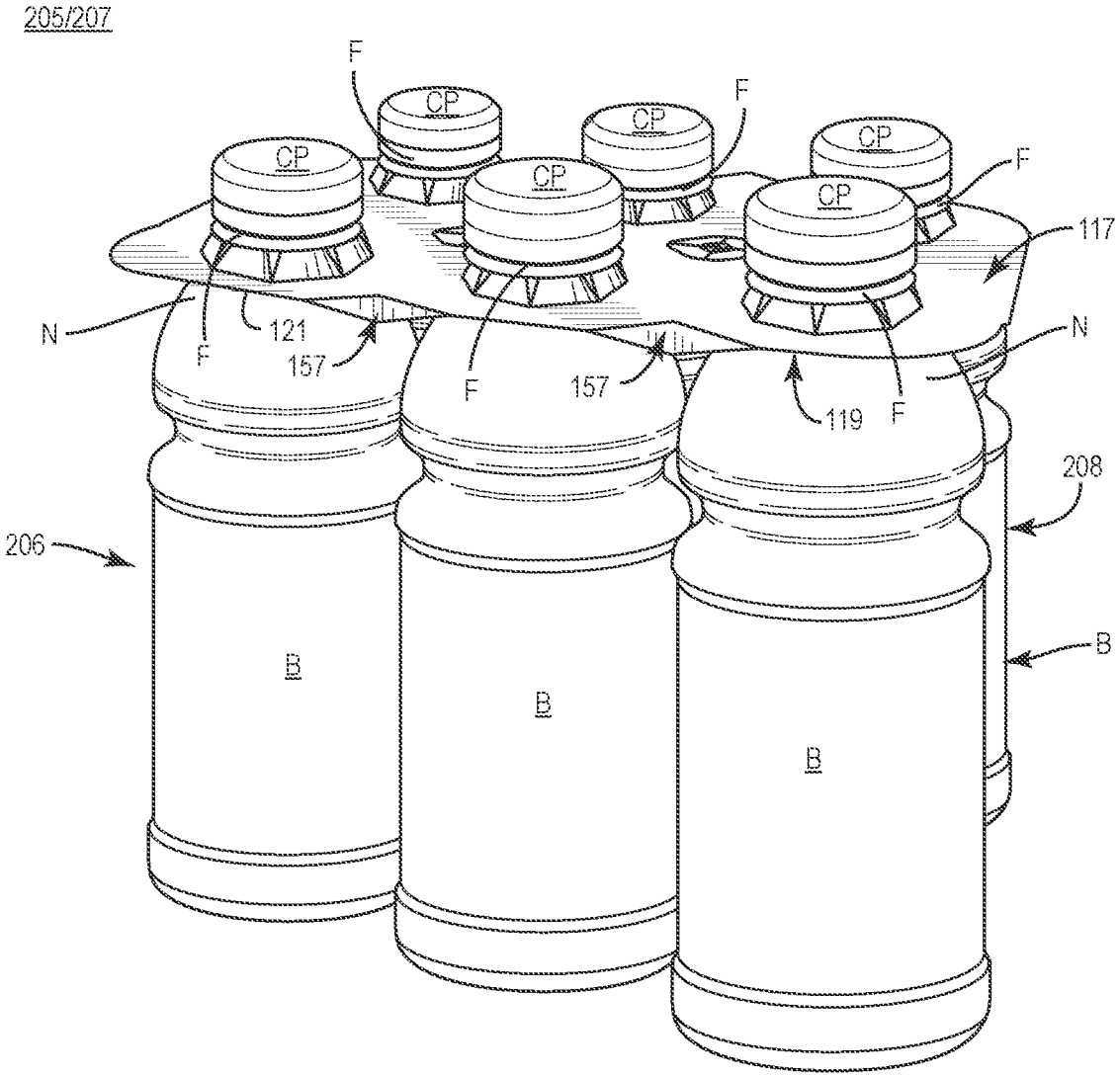


FIG. 6

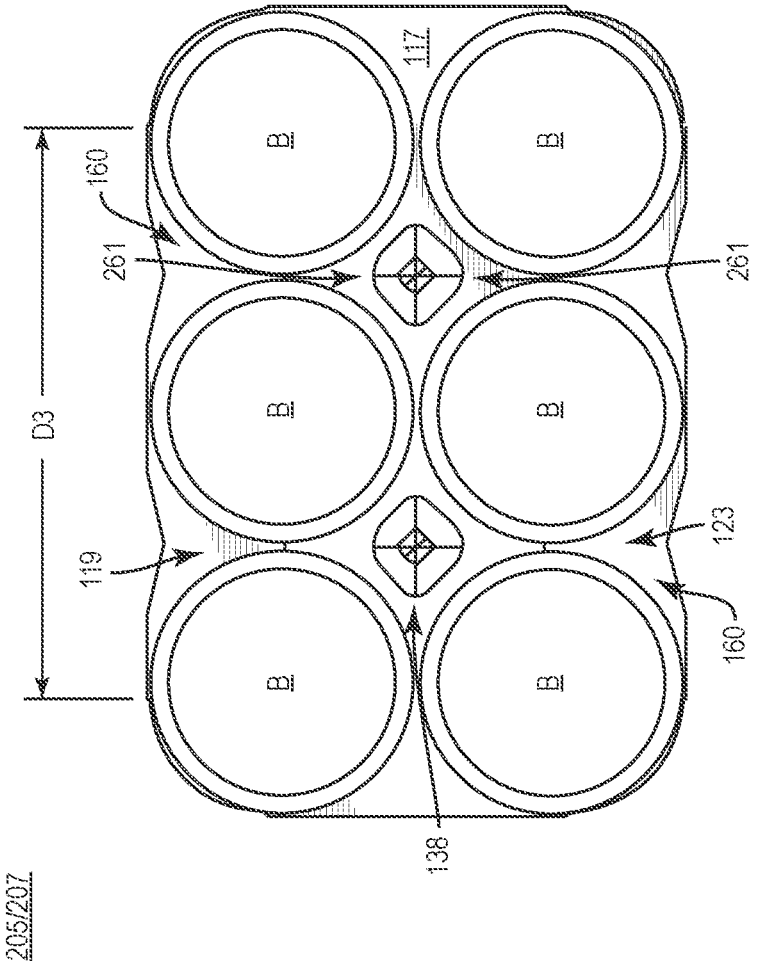


FIG. 7

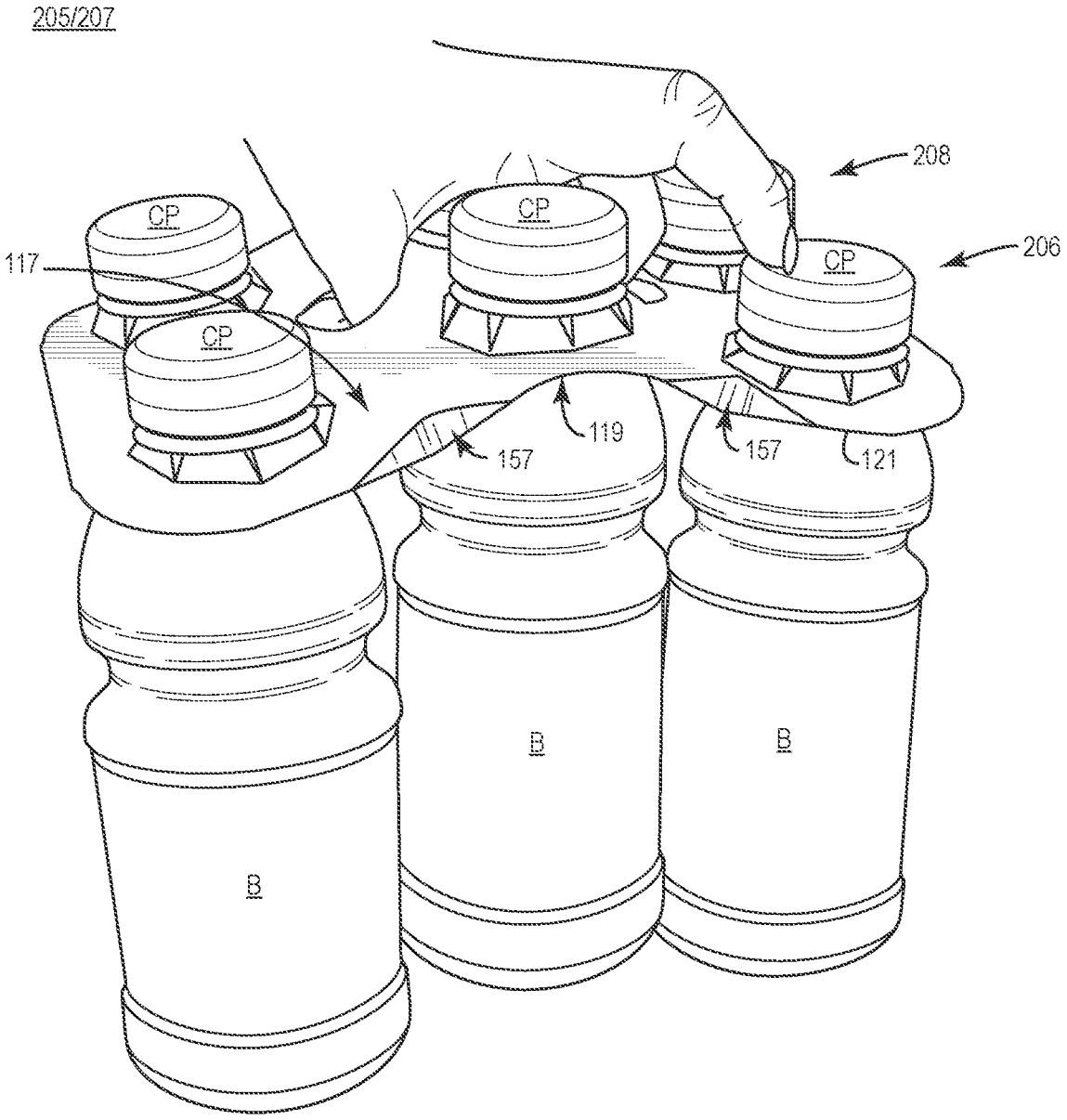
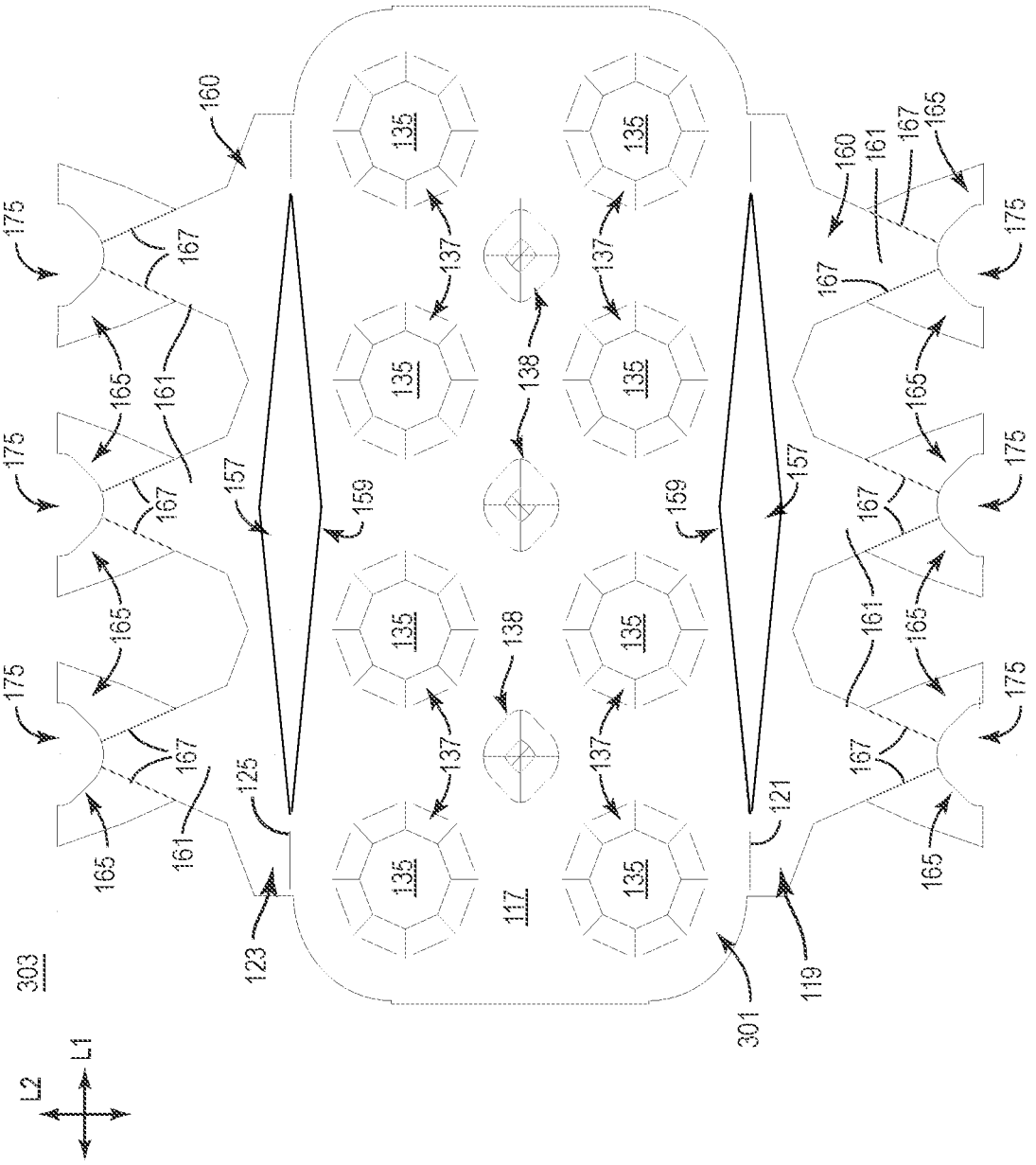


FIG. 8


303
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L1
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121
301

FIG. 9

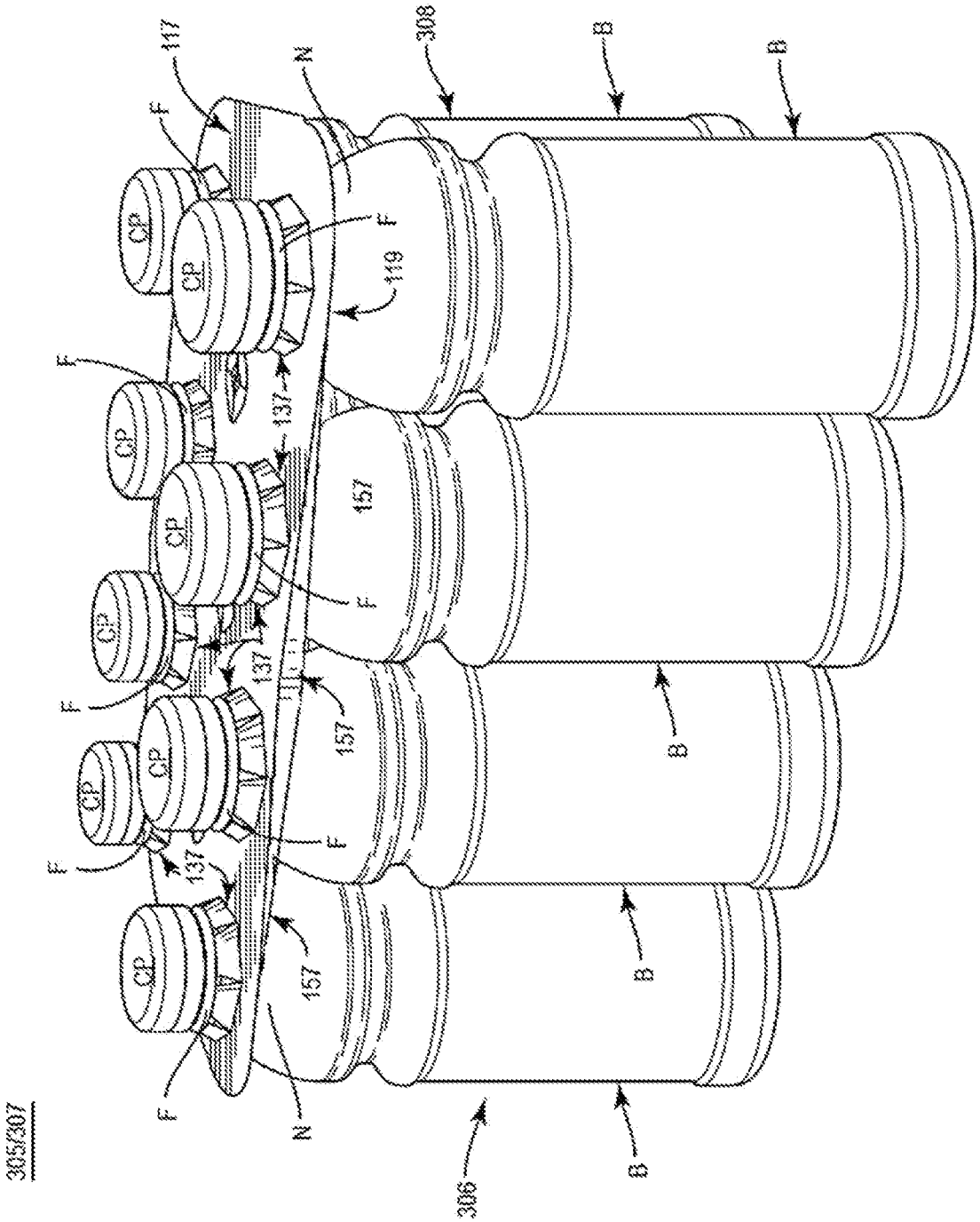

FIG. 10

CARRIER FOR CONTAINERS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of each of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 63/346,494, filed on May 27, 2022, and U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 63/324,264, filed on Mar. 28, 2022.

INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE

[0002] The disclosures of each of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/487,131, filed on Sep. 28, 2021, U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/487,113, filed on Sep. 28, 2021, U.S. Design patent application Ser. No. 29/775,557, filed on Mar. 24, 2021, U.S. Design patent application Ser. No. 29/775,558, filed on Mar. 24, 2021, U.S. Design patent application Ser. No. 29/775,559, filed on Mar. 24, 2021, U.S. Design patent application Ser. No. 29/775,560, filed on Mar. 24, 2021, U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/487,262, filed on Sep. 28, 2021, U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/835,127, filed on Jun. 8, 2022, U.S. Design patent Application Ser. No. 29/838,182, filed on May 11, 2022, U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 63/346,494, filed on May 27, 2022, and U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 63/324,264, filed on Mar. 28, 2022, are hereby incorporated by reference for all purposes as if presented herein in their entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0003] The present disclosure generally relates to cartons or carriers for holding, displaying, and/or transporting containers.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0004] According to one aspect, the disclosure is generally directed to a carrier for holding a plurality of containers, the carrier comprising a central panel comprising a plurality of container retention openings for at least partially receiving a respective container of the plurality of containers, at least one reinforcement flap foldably connected to the central panel at a fold line, the at least one reinforcement flap comprising a base portion and a plurality of spaced extents extending from the base portion for being positioned between respective containers of the plurality of containers, and at least one reinforcement feature interrupting the fold line and positioned between the central panel and the at least one reinforcement flap.

[0005] According to another aspect, the disclosure is generally directed to a blank for forming a carrier for holding a plurality of containers, the blank comprising a top panel comprising a plurality of container retention openings for at least partially receiving a respective container of the plurality of containers when the carrier is formed from the blank, a central panel comprising a plurality of container retention openings for at least partially receiving a respective container of the plurality of containers, at least one reinforcement flap foldably connected to the top panel at a fold line, the at least one reinforcement flap comprising a base portion and a plurality of spaced extents extending from the base portion for being positioned between respective containers of the plurality of containers when the carrier is formed from the blank, and at least one reinforcement feature interrupting the fold line and positioned between the central panel and the at least one reinforcement flap.

[0006] According to another aspect, the disclosure is generally directed to a method of forming a carrier for holding a plurality of containers, the method comprising obtaining a blank comprising a central panel comprising a plurality of container retention openings, at least one reinforcement flap foldably connected to the central panel at a fold line, the at least one reinforcement flap comprising a base portion and a plurality of spaced extents extending from the base portion, and at least one reinforcement feature interrupting the fold line and positioned between the central panel and the at least one reinforcement flap. The method further comprises folding the at least one reinforcement flap such that the plurality of container retention openings are positioned for at least partially receiving a respective container of the plurality of containers and such that the plurality of spaced extents are for being positioned between respective containers of the plurality of containers.

[0007] According to another aspect, the disclosure is generally directed to a package, the package comprising a plurality of containers and a carrier holding the plurality of containers. The carrier comprises a central panel comprising a plurality of container retention openings at least partially receiving a respective container of the plurality of containers, at least one reinforcement flap foldably connected to the central panel at a fold line, the at least one reinforcement flap comprising a base portion and a plurality of spaced extents extending from the base portion and positioned between respective containers of the plurality of containers, and at least one reinforcement feature interrupting the fold line and positioned between the central panel and the at least one reinforcement flap.

[0008] Those skilled in the art will appreciate the above stated advantages and other advantages and benefits of various additional embodiments reading the following detailed description of the embodiments with reference to the below-listed drawing figures. It is within the scope of the present disclosure that the above-discussed aspects be provided both individually and in various combinations.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] According to common practice, the various features of the drawings discussed below are not necessarily drawn to scale. Dimensions of various features and elements in the drawings may be expanded or reduced to more clearly illustrate the embodiments of the disclosure.

[0010] FIG. **1** is a plan view of an outer surface of a blank for forming a carrier according to a first exemplary embodiment of the disclosure.

[0011] FIG. **1**A is an enlarged view of a portion of the blank of FIG. **1**.

[0012] FIG. **1**B is another enlarged view of a portion of the blank of FIG. **1**.

[0013] FIG. **2** is a perspective view of a package including a carrier formed from the blank of FIG. **1** and a plurality of containers according to the first exemplary embodiment of the disclosure.

[0014] FIG. **3** is a bottom plan view of the package and carrier of FIG. **2**.

[0015] FIG. **4** is a perspective view of the package and carrier of FIG. **2** being lifted by a user.

[0016] FIG. **5** is a plan view of an outer surface of a blank for forming a carrier according to a second exemplary embodiment of the disclosure.

[0017] FIG. **5**A is an enlarged view of a portion of the blank of FIG. **5**.

[0018] FIG. **6** is a perspective view of a package including a carrier formed from the blank of FIG. **5** and a plurality of containers according to the second exemplary embodiment of the disclosure.

[0019] FIG. **7** is a bottom plan view of the package and carrier of FIG. **6**.

[0020] FIG. **8** is a perspective view of the package and carrier of FIG. **6** being lifted by a user.

[0021] FIG. **9** is a plan view of an outer surface of a blank for forming a carrier according to a third exemplary embodiment of the disclosure.

[0022] FIG. **10** is a perspective view of a package including a carrier formed from the blank of FIG. **9** and a plurality of containers according to the third exemplary embodiment of the disclosure.

[0023] Corresponding parts are designated by corresponding reference numbers throughout the drawings.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0024] The present disclosure generally relates to carriers, packages, constructs, sleeves, cartons, or the like, for holding and displaying containers such as jars, bottles, cans, etc. The containers can be used for packaging food and beverage products, for example. The containers can be made from materials suitable in composition for packaging the particular food or beverage item, and the materials include, but are not limited to, glass; plastics such as PET, LDPE, LLDPE, HDPE, PP, PS, PVC, EVOH, and Nylon; and the like; aluminum and/or other metals; or any combination thereof.

[0025] Packages according to the present disclosure can accommodate containers of numerous different shapes. For the purpose of illustration and not for the purpose of limiting the scope of the disclosure, the following detailed description describes beverage containers (e.g., generally cylindrical containers such as aluminum cans) at least partially disposed within the package embodiments. In this specification, the terms "lower," "bottom," "upper" and "top" indicate orientations determined in relation to fully erected packages.

[0026] FIG. **1** is a plan view of an exterior surface **101** of a blank **103** for forming a carrier **105** (FIG. **2**) according to a first exemplary embodiment of the disclosure. FIGS. **1**A and **1**B are detail views of portions of the blank **103**. As described further herein, the carrier **105** can be configured for holding/supporting/retaining/receiving a plurality of containers. The carrier **105** can be provided with one or more containers to form a package **107** (FIG. **2**).

[0027] As shown in FIG. **2**, the carrier **105** is sized to contain or support eight containers B, with four containers B being attached to a front portion **106** of the carrier **105** and four containers B being attached to a back portion **108** of the carrier **105**. In the illustrated embodiment, the containers B can be bottles, e.g., plastic bottles formed of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) or another polymer, and having upper portions that include an at least partially tapered neck portion N intersecting a flange F that at least partially supports a cap CP. In other embodiments, the containers B could be beverage cans or another suitable type and size of container. The carrier **105** can be provided together with one or more of the containers B as a package **107**.

[0028] Still referring to FIGS. **1**, **1**A, and **1**B, the blank **103** has a longitudinal axis L**1** and a lateral axis L**2**. In one embodiment, the axis L**1** can be a lateral axis and the axis L**2** can be a longitudinal axis. The blank **103** comprises an attachment panel or central panel **117** that includes container retention features for engaging containers B when the carrier **105** is formed from the blank **103**, as described further herein.

[0029] In the illustrated embodiment, the blank **103** also comprises a first reinforcement panel or first reinforcement flap **119** foldably connected to the central panel **117** at a longitudinal fold line **121** (broadly, "first fold line"), and a second reinforcement panel or second reinforcement flap **123** foldably connected to the central panel **117** at a longitudinal fold line **125** (broadly, "second fold line"). As described further herein, one or both of the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** can include reinforcement features for at least partially reinforcing one or more portions of the carrier **105**/package **107** formed from the blank **103**. In some embodiments, one or both of the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** can also form part of the container retention features of the blank **103**/carrier **105**/package **107**.

[0030] The container retention features of the blank **103**/central panel **117** can include at least container retention openings **135** (broadly, "first plurality of container retention openings"). As shown, the container retention openings **135** can be provided in a column and row arrangement in a number that corresponds to a desired number of containers to be held by the carrier **105** formed from the blank **103**. While the central panel **117** is shown having container retention openings **135** provided in two rows/columns of four openings **135** each, it will be understood that a different number and/or arrangement of container retention openings **135** can be provided without departing from the disclosure.

[0031] As shown in FIGS. **1** and **1**A, the container retention openings **135** can have a generally circular configuration, with container retention tabs **137** (broadly, "first container retention tabs" or "first container retention protrusions") at least partially foldably connected to the central panel **117** at respective oblique fold lines **139** and positioned extending into/toward the container retention opening **135** on laterally and longitudinally opposite sides thereof. Adjacent container retention tabs **137** can be at least partially separated at a respective oblique cut **136**. It will be understood that one or more of the container retention tabs **137** can have a different configuration or arrangement without departing from the disclosure. For example, in one embodiment, the container retention tabs **137** can have the form of edges of the central panel **117** that protrude into the respective container retention openings **135**.

[0032] As shown in detail in FIG. **1**B, the blank **103**/carrier **105** can also have handle features that include a plurality of handle openings **138** defined in the central panel **117** by a pair of laterally opposed curved edges **140**, a pair of longitudinally opposed curved edges **142**, and a plurality of oblique edges **144** extending from an endpoint of a respective curved edge **140** to an endpoint of a respective adjacent curved edge **142**.

[0033] Respective pairs of handle flaps **141**, **143** can be foldably connected to the central panel **117** at respective oblique fold lines **145** and positioned extending at least partially into each respective handle opening **138**. The handle tabs **141**, **143** can be arranged in respective adjacent pairs, with each pair of handle tabs **141** positioned in generally opposed relation and adjacent a respective pair of handle tabs **143** that are in opposed relation, with adjacent

handle tabs **141**, **143** separated at a respective cut **146**. In the illustrated embodiment, the oblique fold lines **145** can be at least partially coextensive with the respective oblique edges **144** of the respective handle openings **138**.

[0034] In this regard, and as shown, a set of four alternating and generally opposed handle tabs **141**, **143** can be provided at selected locations and/or selected intervals along the central panel **117**. It will be understood that a different number and arrangement of handle features can be provided without departing from the disclosure.

[0035] As shown, the handle tabs **141** can have generally concave curved free edges that extend from an endpoint of a respective adjacent cut **146** to an endpoint of another respective adjacent cut **146**. Handle reinforcement flaps **147**, as shown, can be foldably connected to respective handle tabs **143** at respective oblique fold lines **149** and having at least partially curved edges that correspond to the respective concave curved edges of the handle tabs **141**. The handle reinforcement flaps **147** can be at least partially bisected by respective cuts **146**, and adjacent handle reinforcement flaps **147** can be separated at respective oblique cuts **151**.

[0036] With continued reference to FIGS. **1**, **1**A, and **1**B, the blank **103**/carrier **105** formed therefrom can be configured to stiffen/inhibit relative movement of portions of the blank **103**/carrier **105** when in use. As shown, a series of three laterally-spaced reinforcement panels **157** (broadly, "first reinforcement feature" or "first plurality of spaced apart reinforcement features") can be positioned interrupting the fold line **121**. Each reinforcement panel **157**, as shown, can be a region of the blank **103**/carrier **105** between the central panel **117** and the reinforcement flap **119** and that is defined by a line of weakening **159** extending between endpoints of segments of the fold line **121**.

[0037] The line of weakening **159**, as shown, can include a plurality of intersecting oblique segments **159***a*, **159***b*, **159***c*, **159***d*. In the illustrated embodiment, each of the segments **159***a*, **159***b*, **159***c*, **159***d* can be arranged so as to form a generally rhomboid/diamond-shaped reinforcement panel **157**. In one embodiment, each of the segments **159***a*, **159***b*, **159***c*, **159***d* of the line of weakening **159** can be arranged at an angle of about 45° relative to each of the axes L**1**, L**2**. It will be understood that one or more of the lines of weakening **159**/reinforcement panels **157** can have one or more different features, e.g., curved and/or longitudinal/lateral portions, without departing from the disclosure.

[0038] As shown, a series of three longitudinally-spaced reinforcement panels **157** (broadly, "second reinforcement feature" or "second plurality of spaced apart reinforcement features") can also be provided interrupting the fold line **125** so as to be positioned between the central panel **117** and the reinforcement flap **123**. It will be understood that a different number and/or arrangement of the reinforcement panels **157** can be provided without departing from the disclosure.

[0039] Still referring to FIGS. **1**, **1**A, and **1**B, reinforcement features of the blank **103**/carrier **105**/package **107** can include one or more portions of the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123**. As shown, the reinforcement flap **119** includes a base portion **160** having the general form of a plurality of longitudinally-spaced apart and tapering lateral extents **161** defining a generally curved free edge **163**. As shown, the base portions **160** of the respective reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** of the blank **103** and carrier **105** formed therefrom can define a first longitudinal width D**1** (FIG. **3**) that is greater than a second longitudinal width D**2** defined by each extent **161**.

[0040] A pair of reinforcement tabs **165**, as shown, can be foldably connected to opposed free edges of the respective extents **161** at respective oblique fold lines **167**. Each reinforcement tab **165**, as shown, defines a respective oblique outer free edge **169** intersecting a respective longitudinal free edge **171**, and a respective interior curved free edge **173** intersecting the respective longitudinal free edge **171**. Each interior curved free edge **173** intersects an endpoint of the reinforcement edge **163** of the adjacent extent **161** so as to form a recessed portion or generally continuous concave edge **175** formed by each set of extents **161** and reinforcement tabs **165**.

[0041] Similarly, the second reinforcement flap **123** can include a base portion **160** having a plurality of longitudinally-spaced extents **161**, as well as the reinforcement tabs **165** and associated features.

[0042] Any of the panels, flaps, fold lines, cuts, or other features could be otherwise shaped, arranged, and/or omitted from the blank **103** without departing from the disclosure. The blank **103** could be sized and/or shaped to accommodate more or less than eight containers without departing from this disclosure.

[0043] With additional reference to FIGS. **2** and **3**, according to one exemplary embodiment of forming the carrier **105**/package **107**, the blank **103** can be positioned above a group of containers B and the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** can be folded toward the interior surface/underside of the blank **103** at the respective fold lines **121**, **125** such that the concave curved edges **175** presented by each reinforcement flap **119**, **123** and associated reinforcement tabs **165** are generally aligned with respective portions of the respect curved edges **140**, **142** and respective adjacent oblique edges **144** of the respective handle openings **138**. Furthermore, in such an arrangement, the respective extents **161** extending from the respective reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** are positioned for extending between respective containers B of the plurality of containers B.

[0044] In such an arrangement, the central panel **117** can be in at least partial face-to-face contact with respective portions of the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123**, and the blank **103** can be lowered upon the containers B such that at least the respective caps CP and flanges F of the respective containers B can be at least partially received through the respective container retention openings **135**. In one embodiment, at least a portion of the neck portion N of one or more of the containers B can be received through a respective container retention opening **135**.

[0045] Such movement of the respective upper portions of the respective containers B through the respective container retention openings **135** can cause the container retention tabs **137** to be urged upwardly at the respective fold lines **139** so as to extend at least partially upwardly relative to the central panel **117**. In this regard, the container retention tabs **137** can extend from the central panel **117** to contact the underside of the respective flanges F or other structure of the top portion of the respective containers B to take up/fill any spacing therebetween and contribute to a stiff and stable engagement of the central panel **117** with the respective containers B.

[0046] In addition, and with reference to FIG. **4**, the overlapping relationship of respective portions of the central panel **117** with the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** is such that

the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** provide an underlying support or shelf-like feature that can minimize/resist bending, buckling, flexion, torsion, etc. and provide a stable platform from which the central panel **117** and container retention tabs **137** extending upwardly therefrom are supported. In one embodiment, the foldable connection of the reinforcement tabs **165** to the respective extents **161** can facilitate relative movement of the reinforcement tabs **165** to the respective extents **161**, for example, to provide stress relief during movement of the carrier **105**/package **107**.

[0047] Further to the support provided by the 2-ply/overlapping engagement of the central panel **117** with the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123**, the reinforcement panels **157** are presented in an outward-facing arrangement relative to the central panel **117** and the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** so as to form a generally upright/vertical structure that further minimizes/resists bending, buckling, flexion, torsion, etc. of the carrier **105**/package **107** relative to a plane defined by the central panel **117** and/or the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123**, e.g., such that the carrier **105**/package **107** minimizes/resists such forces/movement along both the longitudinal axis L**1** and the lateral axis L**2**.

[0048] The package **107**/carrier **105** can be grasped by a consumer by separating selected adjacent handle tabs **141**, **143** from one another at the respective cuts **146** and folding the handle tabs **141**, **143** downwardly at the respective fold lines **145** to expose one or more portions of respective handle openings **138** through which the user can insert one or more of his or her fingers. As described above, the recessed portions **175** of the respective reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** can be positioned abutting/surrounding the respective handle openings **138** such that a user can engage the underside of the respective reinforcement flaps **119**, **123**, adjacent reinforcement tabs **165**, and/or a portion of the central panel **117**, e.g., adjacent the respective recessed portions **175** in order to engage and lift/carry or otherwise move the carrier **105**/package **107**.

[0049] Such engagement of the underside of the carrier **105** can include at least partial separation of the handle reinforcement flaps **147** at the cut **151** and folding thereof at the respective fold lines **149**. In one embodiment, one or more of the handle reinforcement tabs **147** can be folded into at least partial face-to-face contact with the respective reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** so as to be positioned between a respective reinforcement flap **119**, **123** and a respective handle flap **141**, **143** to form a 3-ply reinforced region adjacent one or more of the handle openings **138**.

[0050] Upon formation of the package **107**/carrier **105**, respective containers B can be removed from the carrier **105** by disengaging the container B the central panel **117** and respective reinforcement flap **119**, **123**, for example, by withdrawing the flange F and cap CP of a respective container B through a respective container retention opening **135**.

[0051] It will be understood that the carrier **105**/package **107** can have a different configuration without departing from the disclosure.

[0052] Turning to FIGS. **5** and **5**A, an exterior surface **201** of a blank **203** for forming a carrier **205** and package **207** (FIG. **6**) according to a second exemplary embodiment of the disclosure is illustrated. The blank **203** and carrier/package formed therefrom can have one or more features that are the same or similar to those descried above with respect to the blank **103**/carrier **105**/package **107**, and like or similar features are designated with like or similar reference numerals.

[0053] As shown, the blank **203** can have features that are generally similar to that of the blank **103** described above, except that the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** can be provided without the reinforcement tabs **165** attached to the extents **161**. Furthermore, respective pluralities of longitudinally spaced extents **261** extend from the respective base portions **160** of the respective reinforcement flaps **119**, **123**.

[0054] As shown, the extents **261** of the blank **203** and carrier **205** formed therefrom can have an at least partially truncated/flattened free edge **262**, though the extents **261** of the blank **203**/carrier **205** can incorporate one or more of curved edges, angled edges, tapers, etc., without departing from the disclosure. In this regard, the base portions **160** of the respective reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** of the blank **203** and carrier **205** formed therefrom can define a first longitudinal width D**3** that is larger than a longitudinal width D**4** defined by the respective extents **261**.

[0055] In addition, the handle openings **138** and associated features in the blank **203**/carrier **205** can have an orientation that is rotated generally 90° clockwise or counterclockwise from that of the blank **103**/carrier **105** described above.

[0056] Furthermore, the blank **203** and carrier **205**/package **207** formed therefrom can be sized and configured to hold two rows/columns of three containers B, e.g., such that two rows/columns of container retention openings **135** and associated features are provided, such that a respective pair of longitudinally-spaced reinforcement panels **157** are provided interrupting the respective fold lines **121**, **125**, and such that a respective pair of longitudinally spaced handle openings **138** and associated features can be provided. It will be understood that the blank **203** and carrier **205**/package **207** can be provided with a different configuration and/or arrangement of features corresponding to a desired number of containers B to be supported.

[0057] With additional reference to FIGS. **6** and **7**, the blank **203** can be formed into a carrier **205** and attached to one or more containers B to form a package **207** in a manner similar to that described above with regard to the blank **103**/carrier **105**/package **107**, without the presence of the reinforcement tabs **165** on the underside of the central panel **117**. In this regard, the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** can be folded at the respective fold lines **121**, **125** into at least partial face-to-face contact with the central panel **117**, and the containers B can be at least partially received by/attached to the carrier **205** in a manner similar to that described above with regard to the blank **103**/carrier **105**/package **107**. The extents **161** of the respective reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** can thus be positioned extending between respective containers B of the plurality of containers B.

[0058] The carrier **205**/package **207** can thus be provided with a front portion **206** supporting three containers B and a back portion **208** supporting three containers B.

[0059] With reference to FIG. **8**, the overlapping relationship of respective portions of the central panel **117** with the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** is such that the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** provide an underlying support or shelf-like feature that can minimize/resist bending, buckling, flexion, torsion, etc. and provide a stable platform from which the central panel **117** and container retention tabs **137** extending upwardly therefrom are supported.

[0060] Further to the support provided by the 2-ply/overlapping engagement of the central panel **117** with the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123**, the reinforcement panels **157** are presented in an outward-facing arrangement relative to the central panel **117** and the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** so as to form a generally upright/vertical structure that further minimizes/resists bending, buckling, flexion, torsion, etc. of the carrier **105**/package **107** relative to a plane defined by the central panel **117** and/or the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123**, e.g., such that the carrier **205**/package **207** minimizes/resists such forces/movement along both the longitudinal axis L**1** and the lateral axis L**2** in a manner similar to that described above with respect to the carrier **105**/package **107**.

[0061] Turning to FIG. **9**, an exterior surface **301** of a blank **303** for forming a carrier **305** and package **307** (FIG. **10**) according to a third embodiment of the disclosure is illustrated. The blank **303** and carrier/package formed therefrom can have one or more features that are the same or similar to those descried above with respect to the blank **103**/carrier **105**/package **107** and blank **203**/carrier **205**/package **207**, and like or similar features are designated with like or similar reference numerals.

[0062] As shown, the blank **303** can have features that are generally similar to that of the blank **103** described above, except that a single reinforcement panel **157** is provided interrupting each of the respective fold lines **121**, **125**, the reinforcement panel **157** having a longitudinal width generally greater than that of a respective reinforcement panels **157** of the blank **103**/carrier **105**/package **107** and blank **203**/carrier **205**/package **207** described above.

[0063] In some embodiments, a portion of the fold line **159** associated with one or both of the reinforcement panels **157** can be at least partially interrupted by a cut to facilitate formation of the carrier **305**/package **307** in the manner described herein. In some embodiments, such cut can be positioned along a portion of the respective fold line **159** proximate a respective reinforcement flap **119**, **123**.

[0064] With additional reference to FIG. **10**, the blank **303** can be formed into a carrier **305** and attached to one or more containers B to form a package **307** in a manner similar to that described above with regard to the blank **103**/carrier **105**/package **107** and blank **203**/carrier **205**/package **207**. In this regard, the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** can be folded at the respective fold lines **121**, **125** into at least partial face-to-face contact with the central panel **117**, and the containers B can be at least partially received by/attached to the carrier **305** in a manner similar to that described above with regard to the blank **103**/carrier **105**/package **107** and blank **203**/carrier **205**/package **207**. The extents **161** of the respective reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** can thus be positioned extending between respective containers B of the plurality of containers B.

[0065] The carrier **305**/package **307** can thus be provided with a front portion **306** supporting three containers B and a back portion **308** supporting three containers B.

[0066] The overlapping relationship of respective portions of the central panel **117** with the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** is such that the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** provide an underlying support or shelf-like feature that can minimize/resist bending, buckling, flexion, torsion, etc. and provide a stable platform from which the central panel **117** and container retention tabs **137** extending upwardly therefrom are supported.

[0067] Further to the support provided by the 2-ply/overlapping engagement of the central panel **117** with the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123**, the reinforcement panels **157** are presented in an outward-facing arrangement relative to the central panel **117** and the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123** so as to form a generally upright/vertical structure that further minimizes/resists bending, buckling, flexion, torsion, etc. of the carrier **105**/package **107** relative to a plane defined by the central panel **117** and/or the reinforcement flaps **119**, **123**, e.g., such that the carrier **205**/package **207** minimizes/resists such forces/movement along both the longitudinal axis L**1** and the lateral axis L**2** in a manner similar to that described above with respect to the carrier **105**/package **107** and carrier **205**/package **207**.

[0068] It will be understood that one or more of the blanks **103**, **203**, **303** carriers **105**, **205**, **305** and packages **107**, **207**, **307** described herein can have one or more features that are differently configured or arranged without departing from the disclosure.

[0069] In general, the blank may be constructed from paperboard having a caliper so that it is heavier and more rigid than ordinary paper. The blank can also be constructed of other materials, such as cardboard, or any other material having properties suitable for enabling the carrier to function at least generally as described above. The blank can be coated with, for example, a clay coating. The clay coating may then be printed over with product, advertising, and other information or images. The blanks may then be coated with a varnish to protect information printed on the blanks. The blanks may also be coated with, for example, a moisture barrier layer, on either or both sides of the blanks. The blanks can also be laminated to or coated with one or more sheet-like materials at selected panels or panel sections.

[0070] As an example, a tear line can include: a slit that extends partially into the material along the desired line of weakness, and/or a series of spaced apart slits that extend partially into and/or completely through the material along the desired line of weakness, or various combinations of these features. As a more specific example, one type tear line is in the form of a series of spaced apart slits that extend completely through the material, with adjacent slits being spaced apart slightly so that a nick (e.g., a small somewhat bridging-like piece of the material) is defined between the adjacent slits for typically temporarily connecting the material across the tear line. The nicks are broken during tearing along the tear line. The nicks typically are a relatively small percentage of the tear line, and alternatively the nicks can be omitted from or torn in a tear line such that the tear line is a continuous cut line. That is, it is within the scope of the present disclosure for each of the tear lines to be replaced with a continuous slit, or the like. For example, a cut line can be a continuous slit or could be wider than a slit without departing from the present disclosure.

[0071] In accordance with the exemplary embodiments, a fold line can be any substantially linear, although not necessarily straight, form of weakening that facilitates folding therealong. More specifically, but not for the purpose of narrowing the scope of the present disclosure, fold lines include: a score line, such as lines formed with a blunt scoring knife, or the like, which creates a crushed or depressed portion in the material along the desired line of weakness; a cut that extends partially into a material along the desired line of weakness, and/or a series of cuts that extend partially into and/or completely through the material

along the desired line of weakness; and various combinations of these features. In situations where cutting is used to create a fold line, typically the cutting will not be overly extensive in a manner that might cause a reasonable user to incorrectly consider the fold line to be a tear line.

[0072] The above embodiments may be described as having one or more panels adhered together by glue during erection of the carrier embodiments. The term "glue" is intended to encompass all manner of adhesives commonly used to secure carrier panels in place.

[0073] The foregoing description of the disclosure illustrates and describes various exemplary embodiments. Various additions, modifications, changes, etc., could be made to the exemplary embodiments without departing from the spirit and scope of the disclosure. It is intended that all matter contained in the above description or shown in the accompanying drawings shall be interpreted as illustrative and not in a limiting sense. Additionally, the disclosure shows and describes only selected embodiments of the disclosure, but the disclosure is capable of use in various other combinations, modifications, and environments and is capable of changes or modifications within the scope of the inventive concept as expressed herein, commensurate with the above teachings, and/or within the skill or knowledge of the relevant art. Furthermore, certain features and characteristics of each embodiment may be selectively interchanged and applied to other illustrated and non-illustrated embodiments of the disclosure.

What is claimed is:

1. A carrier for holding a plurality of containers, the carrier comprising:

a central panel comprising a plurality of container retention openings for at least partially receiving a respective container of the plurality of containers;

at least one reinforcement flap foldably connected to the central panel at a fold line, the at least one reinforcement flap comprising a base portion and a plurality of spaced extents extending from the base portion for being positioned between respective containers of the plurality of containers; and

at least one reinforcement feature interrupting the fold line and positioned between the central panel and the at least one reinforcement flap.

2. The carrier of claim **1**, wherein the at least one reinforcement feature is generally upright relative to the central panel.

3. The carrier of claim **2**, wherein the at least one reinforcement feature is formed by a line of weakening.

4. The carrier of claim **3**, wherein the line of weakening includes a plurality of oblique line segments, each oblique line segment of the plurality of oblique line segments intersecting at least one other oblique line segment of the plurality of oblique line segments.

5. The carrier of claim **4**, wherein the at least one reinforcement feature is a generally diamond-shaped panel.

6. The carrier of claim **2**, wherein at least one container retention tab is foldably connected to the central panel at a respective fold line, the at least one container retention tab positioned extending into a respective container retention opening of the plurality of container retention openings.

7. The carrier of claim **6**, wherein the at least one reinforcement flap is a first reinforcement flap, the fold line is a first fold line, the at least one reinforcement feature is a first reinforcement feature interrupting the first fold line, and the carrier further comprises a second reinforcement flap foldably connected to the central panel at a second fold line, the carrier further comprising a second reinforcement feature interrupting the second fold line.

8. The carrier of claim **7**, wherein the first reinforcement feature is a first reinforcement feature of a first plurality of spaced apart reinforcement features interrupting the first fold line, and the second reinforcement feature is a second reinforcement feature of a second plurality of spaced apart reinforcement features interrupting the second fold line.

9. The carrier of claim **2**, wherein the base portion of the at least one reinforcement flap has a first width, and each extent of the plurality of extents has a second width, the first width is greater than the second width.

10. The carrier of claim **9**, wherein at least one extent of the plurality of extents has a tapered configuration.

11. The carrier of claim **9**, further comprising at least one reinforcement tab foldably connected to a respective extent of the plurality of extents.

12. The carrier of claim **11**, further comprising a plurality of handle openings, wherein each extent of the plurality of extents defines a curved free edge aligned with a respective handle opening of the plurality of handle openings.

13. A blank for forming a carrier for holding a plurality of containers, the blank comprising:

a top panel comprising a plurality of container retention openings for at least partially receiving a respective container of the plurality of containers when the carrier is formed from the blank;

a central panel comprising a plurality of container retention openings for at least partially receiving a respective container of the plurality of containers;

at least one reinforcement flap foldably connected to the top panel at a fold line, the at least one reinforcement flap comprising a base portion and a plurality of spaced extents extending from the base portion for being positioned between respective containers of the plurality of containers when the carrier is formed from the blank; and

at least one reinforcement feature interrupting the fold line and positioned between the central panel and the at least one reinforcement flap.

14. The blank of claim **13**, wherein the at least one reinforcement feature is for being positioned generally upright relative to the central panel when the carrier is formed from the blank.

15. The blank of claim **14**, wherein the at least one reinforcement feature is formed by a line of weakening.

16. The blank of claim **15**, wherein the line of weakening includes a plurality of oblique line segments, each oblique line segment of the plurality of oblique line segments intersecting at least one other oblique line segment of the plurality of oblique line segments.

17. The blank of claim **16**, wherein the at least one reinforcement feature is a generally diamond-shaped panel.

18. The blank of claim **14**, wherein at least one container retention tab is foldably connected to the central panel at a respective fold line, the at least one container retention tab positioned extending into a respective container retention opening of the plurality of container retention openings.

19. The blank of claim **18**, wherein the at least one reinforcement flap is a first reinforcement flap, the fold line is a first fold line, the at least one reinforcement feature is a first reinforcement feature interrupting the first fold line, and

the blank further comprises a second reinforcement flap foldably connected to the central panel at a second fold line, the blank further comprising a second reinforcement feature interrupting the second fold line.

20. The blank of claim **19**, wherein the first reinforcement feature is a first reinforcement feature of a first plurality of spaced apart reinforcement features interrupting the first fold line, and the second reinforcement feature is a second reinforcement feature of a second plurality of spaced apart reinforcement features interrupting the second fold line.

21. The blank of claim **14**, wherein the base portion of the at least one reinforcement flap has a first width, and each extent of the plurality of extents has a second width, the first width is greater than the second width.

22. The blank of claim **21**, wherein at least one extent of the plurality of extents has a tapered configuration.

23. The blank of claim **21**, further comprising at least one reinforcement tab foldably connected to a respective extent of the plurality of extents.

24. The blank of claim **23**, further comprising a plurality of handle openings, wherein each extent of the plurality of extents defines a curved free edge for being aligned with a respective handle opening of the plurality of handle openings when the carrier is formed from the blank.

25. A method of forming a carrier for holding a plurality of containers, the method comprising:

obtaining a blank comprising a central panel comprising a plurality of container retention openings, at least one reinforcement flap foldably connected to the central panel at a fold line, the at least one reinforcement flap comprising a base portion and a plurality of spaced extents extending from the base portion, and at least one reinforcement feature interrupting the fold line and positioned between the central panel and the at least one reinforcement flap; and

folding the at least one reinforcement flap such that the plurality of container retention openings are positioned for at least partially receiving a respective container of the plurality of containers and such that the plurality of spaced extents are for being positioned between respective containers of the plurality of containers.

26. The method of claim **25**, wherein the at least one reinforcement flap is folded such that the at least one reinforcement feature is generally upright relative to the central panel.

27. The method of claim **26**, wherein the at least one reinforcement feature is formed by a line of weakening.

28. The method of claim **27**, wherein the line of weakening includes a plurality of oblique line segments, each oblique line segment of the plurality of oblique line segments intersecting at least one other oblique line segment of the plurality of oblique line segments.

29. The method of claim **28**, wherein the at least one reinforcement feature is a generally diamond-shaped panel.

30. The method of claim **26**, wherein at least one container retention tab is foldably connected to the central panel at a respective fold line, the at least one container retention tab positioned extending into a respective container retention opening of the plurality of container retention openings.

31. The method of claim **30**, wherein the at least one reinforcement flap is a first reinforcement flap, the fold line is a first fold line, the at least one reinforcement feature is a first reinforcement feature interrupting the first fold line, and the blank further comprises a second reinforcement flap foldably connected to the central panel at a second fold line, the blank further comprising a second reinforcement feature interrupting the second fold line.

32. The method of claim **31**, wherein the first reinforcement feature is a first reinforcement feature of a first plurality of spaced apart reinforcement features interrupting the first fold line, and the second reinforcement feature is a second reinforcement feature of a second plurality of spaced apart reinforcement features interrupting the second fold line.

33. The method of claim **26**, wherein the base portion of the at least one reinforcement flap has a first width, and each extent of the plurality of extents has a second width, the first width is greater than the second width.

34. The method of claim **33**, wherein at least one extent of the plurality of extents has a tapered configuration.

35. The method of claim **33**, wherein the blank further comprises at least one reinforcement tab foldably connected to a respective extent of the plurality of extents.

36. The method of claim **35**, wherein the blank further comprises a plurality of handle openings and each extent of the plurality of extents defines a curved free edge, and wherein the at least one reinforcement flap is folded such that the curved free edge of a respective extent of the plurality of extents is aligned with a respective handle opening of the plurality of handle openings.

37. A package, the package comprising:

a plurality of containers; and

a carrier holding the plurality of containers, the carrier comprising:

a central panel comprising a plurality of container retention openings at least partially receiving a respective container of the plurality of containers;

at least one reinforcement flap foldably connected to the central panel at a fold line, the at least one reinforcement flap comprising a base portion and a plurality of spaced extents extending from the base portion and positioned between respective containers of the plurality of containers; and

at least one reinforcement feature interrupting the fold line and positioned between the central panel and the at least one reinforcement flap.

38. The package of claim **37**, wherein the at least one reinforcement feature is generally upright relative to the central panel.

39. The package of claim **38**, wherein the at least one reinforcement feature is formed by a line of weakening.

40. The package of claim **39**, wherein the line of weakening includes a plurality of oblique line segments, each oblique line segment of the plurality of oblique line segments intersecting at least one other oblique line segment of the plurality of oblique line segments.

41. The package of claim **40**, wherein the at least one reinforcement feature is a generally diamond-shaped panel.

42. The package of claim **38**, wherein at least one container retention tab is foldably connected to the central panel at a respective fold line, the at least one container retention tab positioned extending into a respective container retention opening of the plurality of container retention openings.

43. The package of claim **42**, wherein the at least one reinforcement flap is a first reinforcement flap, the fold line is a first fold line, the at least one reinforcement feature is a first reinforcement feature interrupting the first fold line, and the carrier further comprises a second reinforcement flap

foldably connected to the central panel at a second fold line, the carrier further comprising a second reinforcement feature interrupting the second fold line.

44. The package of claim **43**, wherein the first reinforcement feature is a first reinforcement feature of a first plurality of spaced apart reinforcement features interrupting the first fold line, and the second reinforcement feature is a second reinforcement feature of a second plurality of spaced apart reinforcement features interrupting the second fold line.

45. The package of claim **38**, wherein the base portion of the at least one reinforcement flap has a first width, and each extent of the plurality of extents has a second width, the first width is greater than the second width.

46. The package of claim **45**, wherein at least one extent of the plurality of extents has a tapered configuration.

47. The package of claim **45**, further comprising at least one reinforcement tab foldably connected to a respective extent of the plurality of extents.

48. The package of claim **47**, further comprising a plurality of handle openings, wherein each extent of the plurality of extents defines a curved free edge aligned with a respective handle opening of the plurality of handle openings.

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