



US 20070007223A1

(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**
Thrush et al.

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2007/0007223 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Jan. 11, 2007**

(54) **MODULAR OVERHEAD STORAGE**

Publication Classification

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(51) **Int. Cl.**
A47F 5/08 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **211/118; 211/189**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A storage system comprises a rack of multiple platforms connectable to one another in a first direction, where each of the platforms has segments that connect to one another along a direction other than the first direction, via a user-operable coupling. The platforms are preferably rectangular, and are connected at their long ends. The segments of each platform are also preferably rectangular, but they are connected along their long sides. In such embodiments, the connection between platforms is perpendicular to the length of the rack, while the connection between segments is parallel to the length of the rack. The segments of individual platforms are preferably coupled together with snap fit connections, and supported from their undersides by transverse supports, and the transverse supports are supported from their undersides by longitudinal supports. The transverse supports are preferably perpendicular to the longitudinal supports.

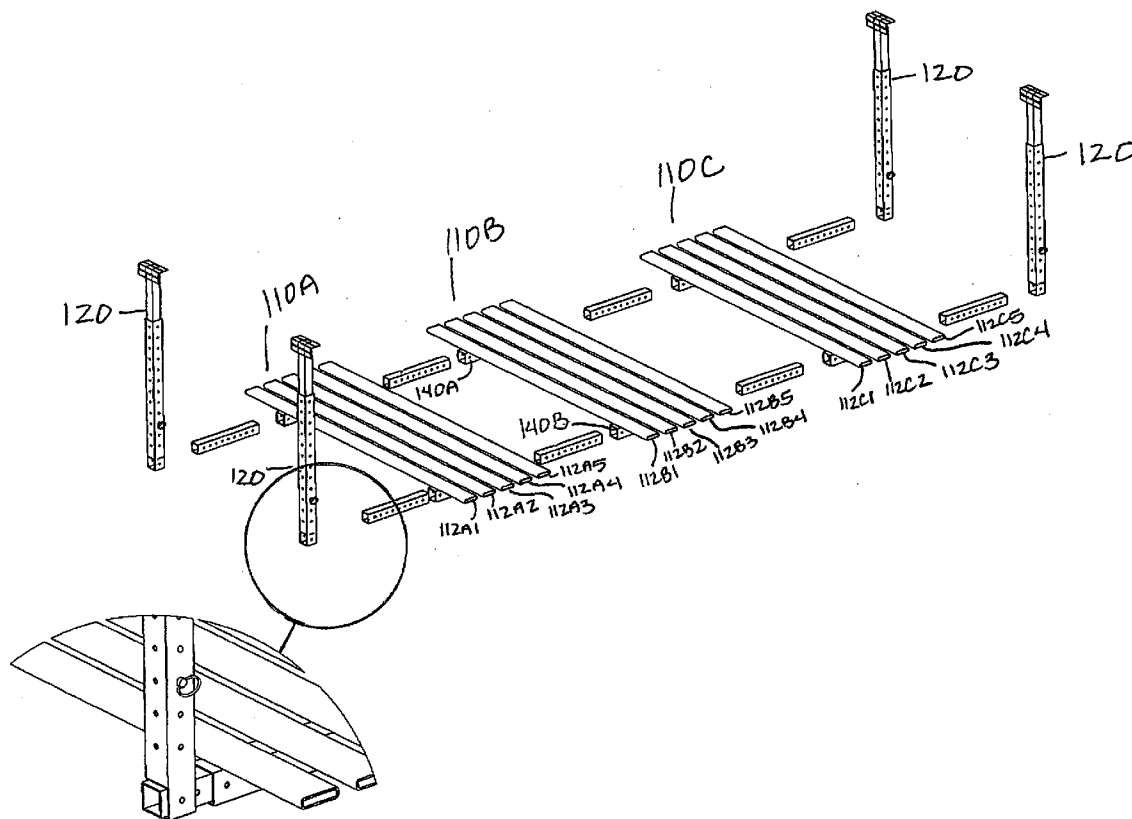
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(21) Appl. No.: **11/479,480**

(22) Filed: **Jun. 30, 2006**

Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 60/697,468, filed on Jul. 7, 2005. Provisional application No. 60/726,746, filed on Oct. 14, 2005.



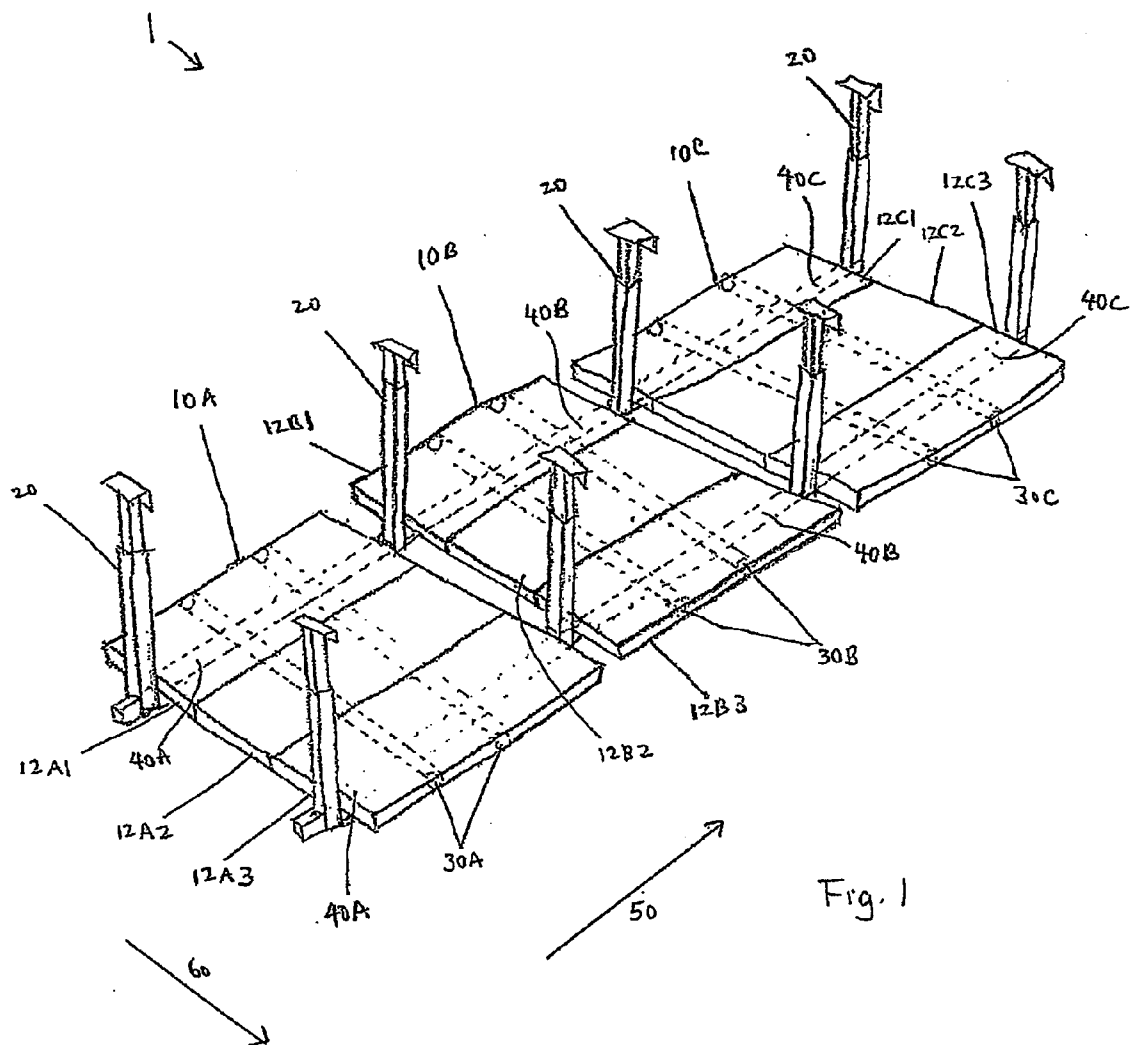


Fig. 1

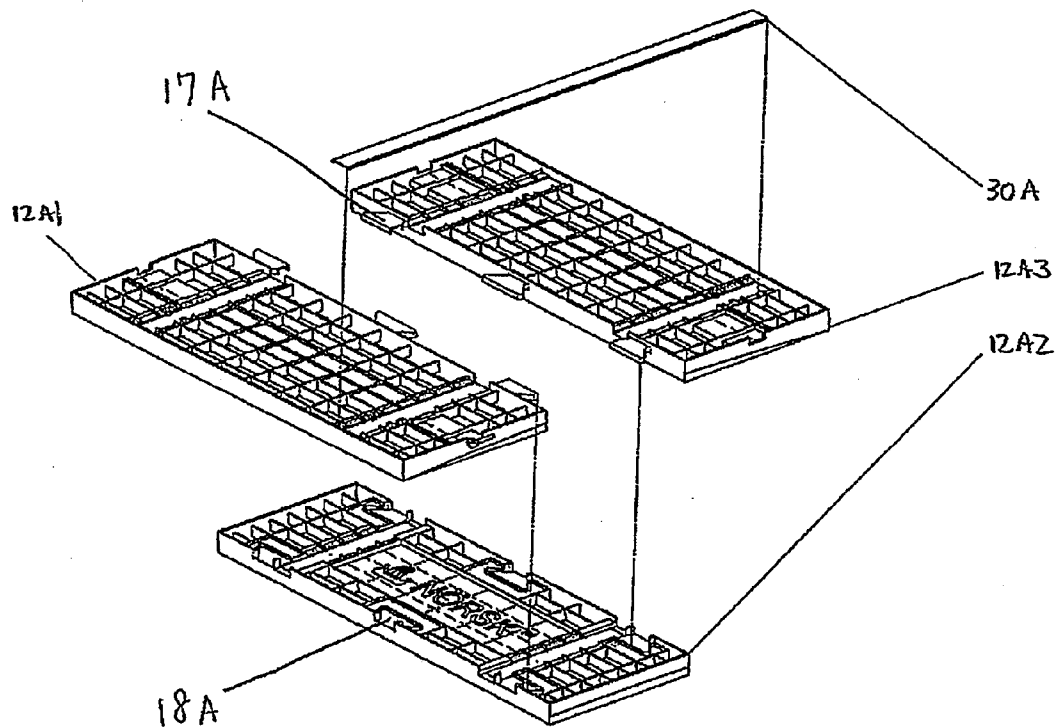


Fig. 2

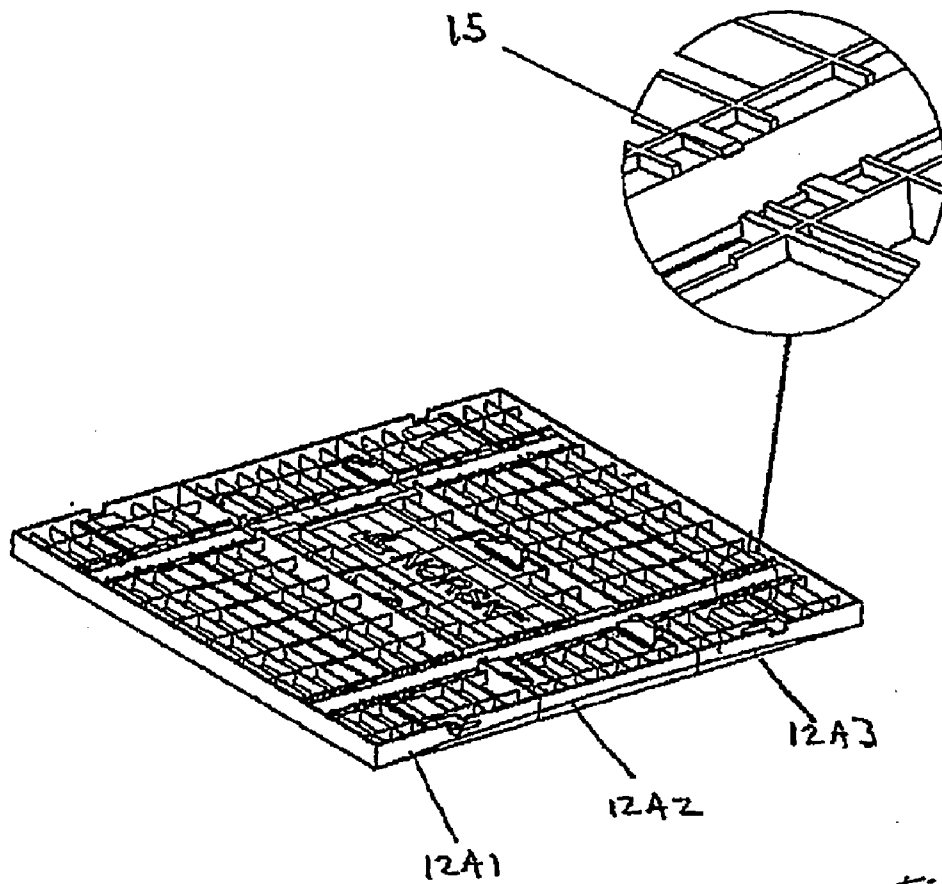


Fig-3

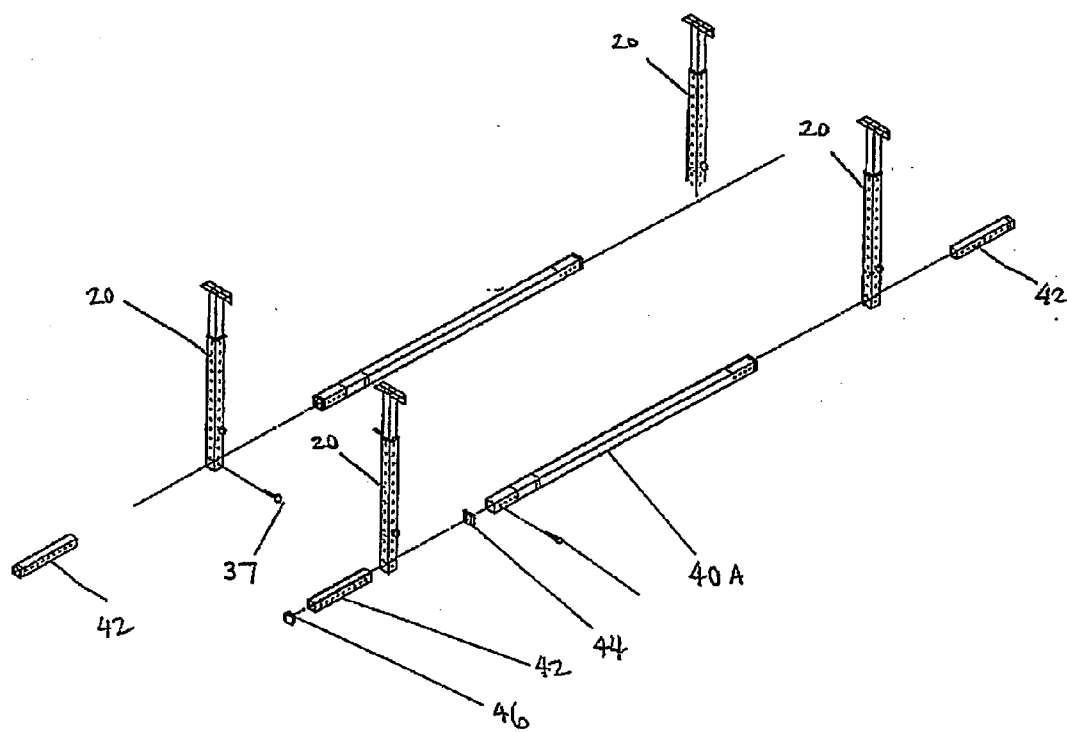
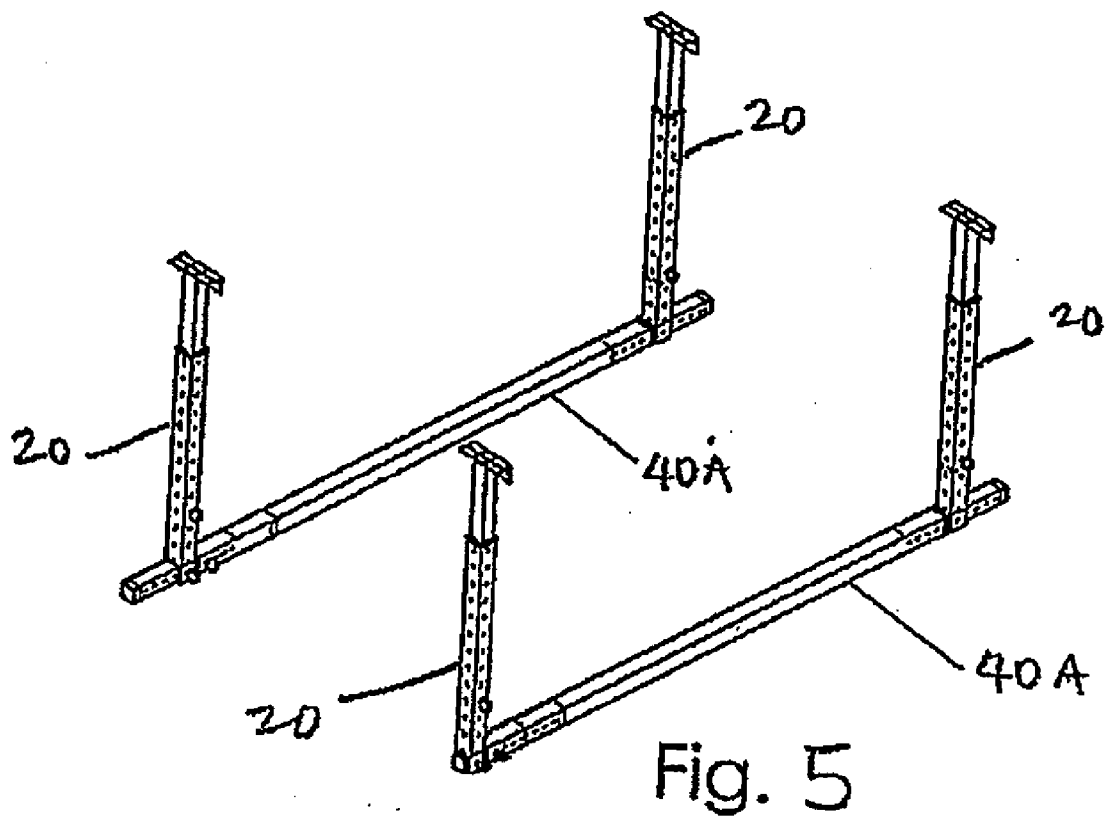


Fig. 4



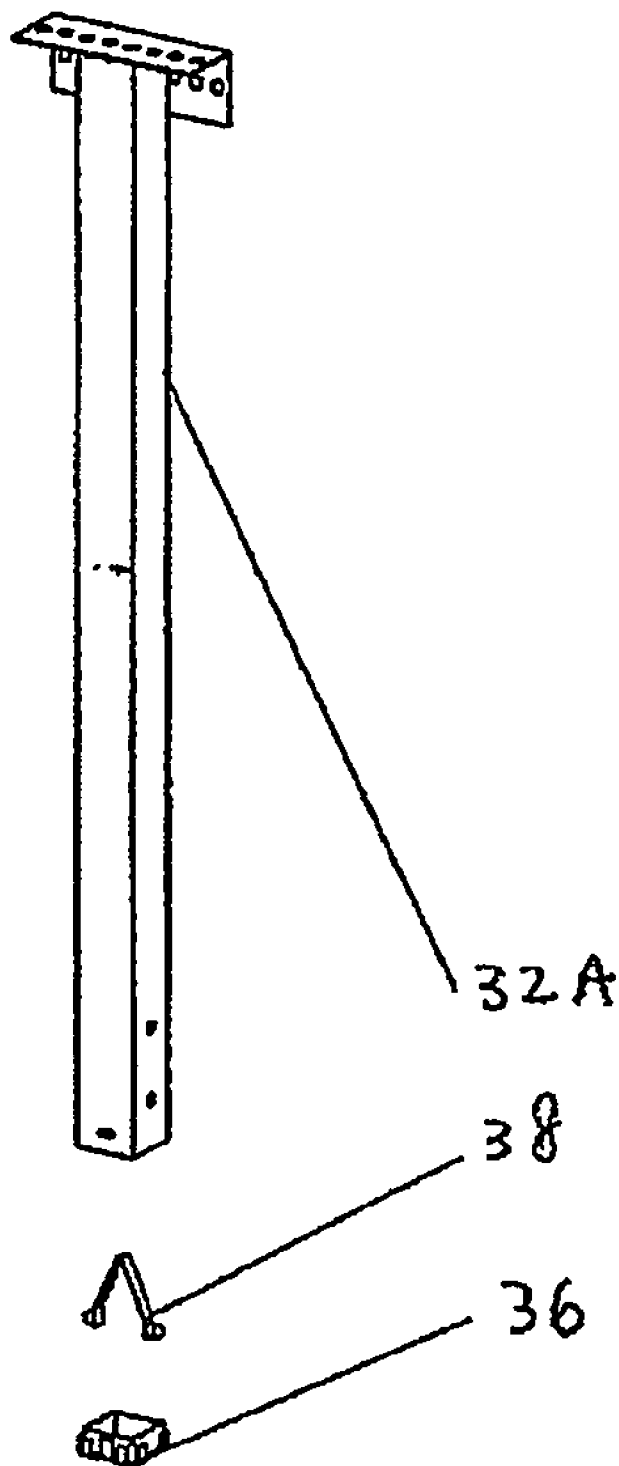


Fig. 6

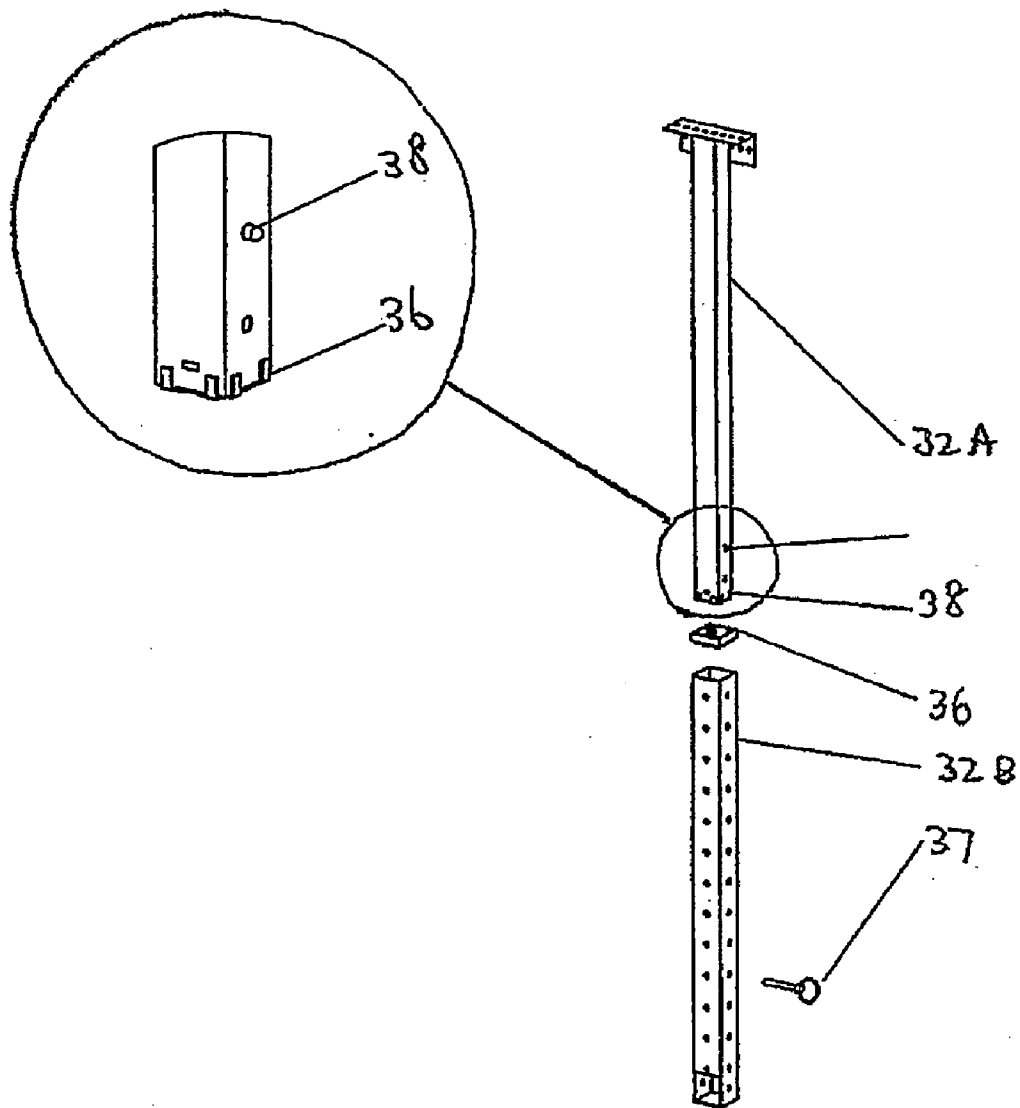


Fig. 7

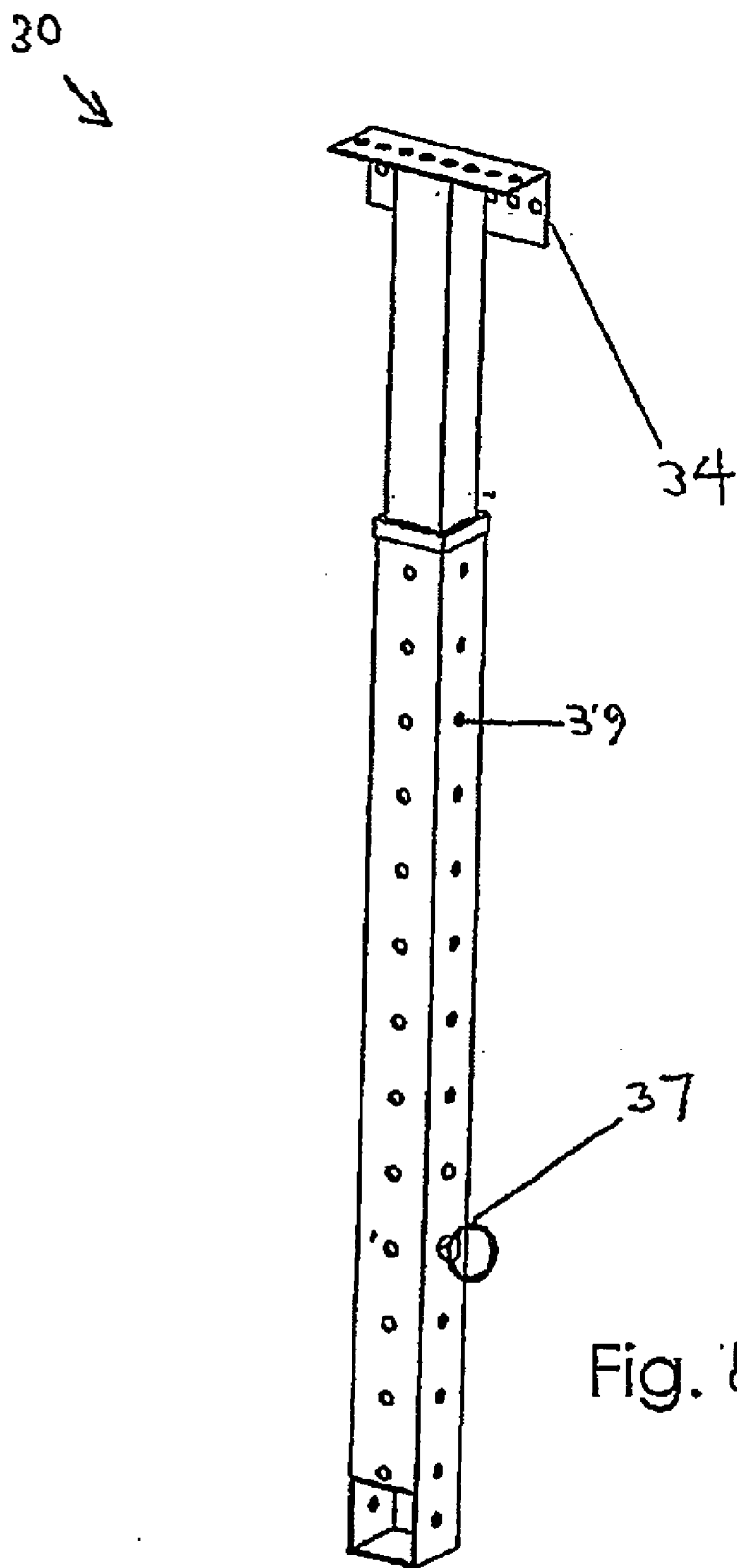


Fig. 8

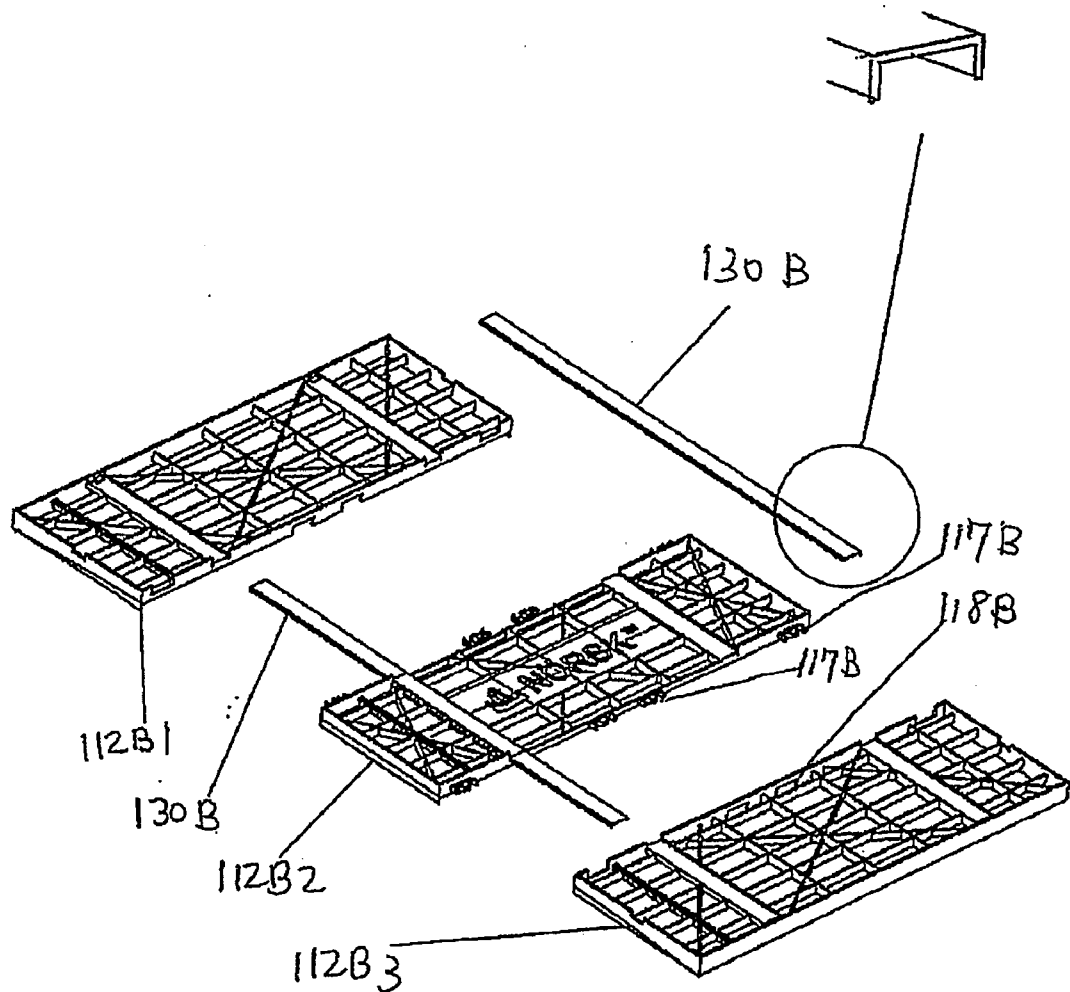


Fig. 9

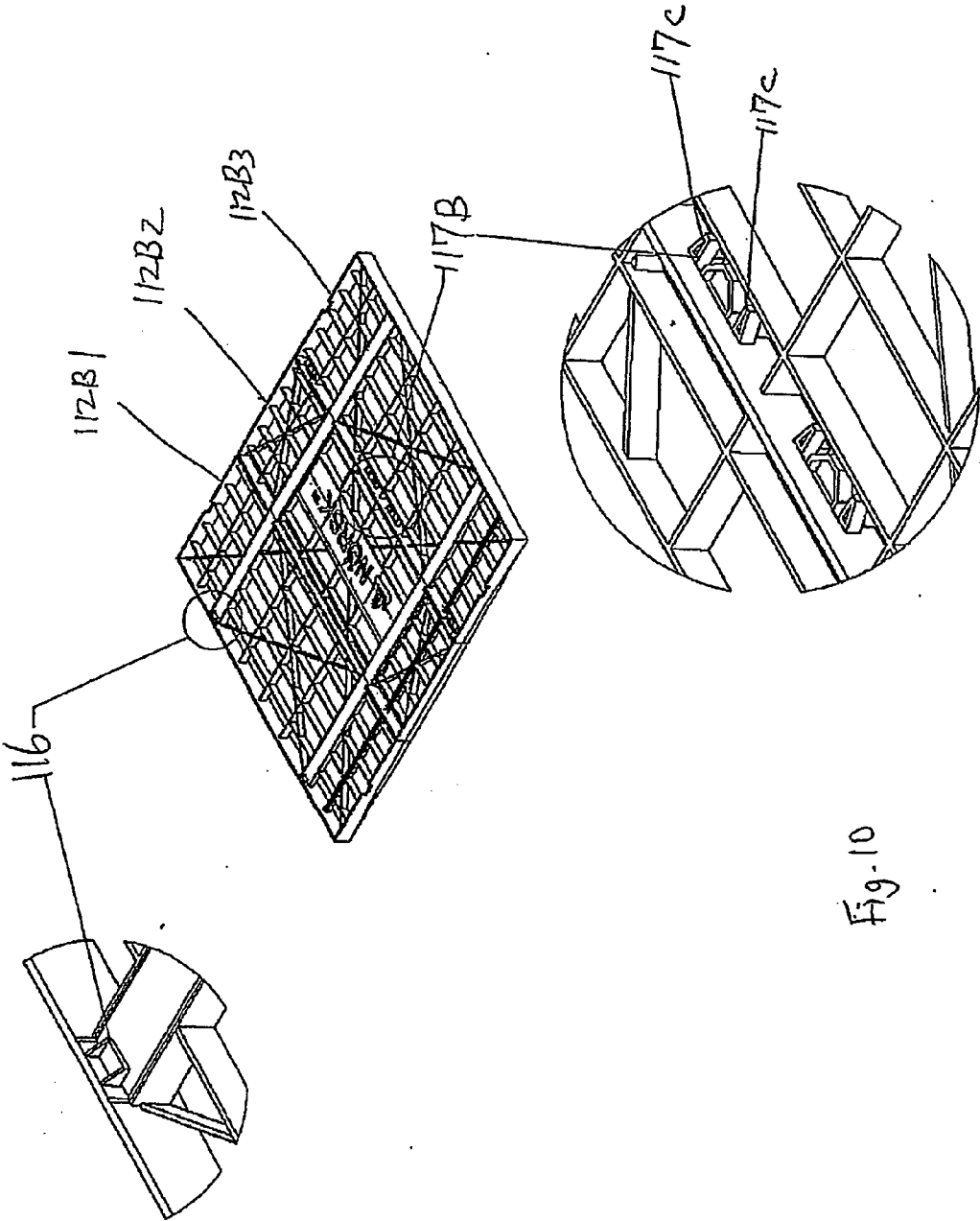


Fig. 10

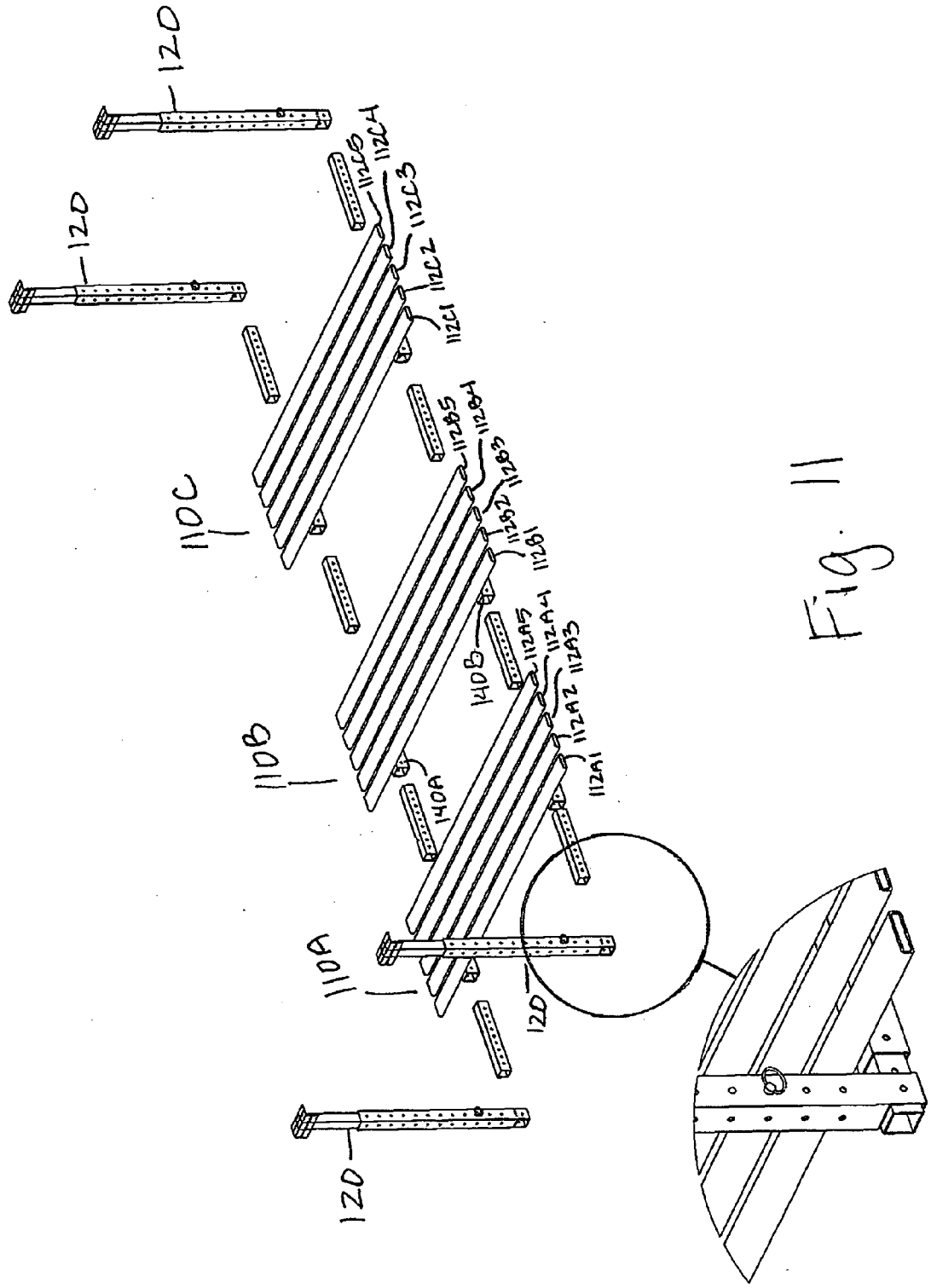


Fig. 11

MODULAR OVERHEAD STORAGE

[0001] This application claims the benefit of our U.S. provisional patent application with the Ser. No. 60/697468, which was filed Jul. 7, 2005 and U.S. provisional patent application with the Ser. No. 60/726746, which was filed Oct. 14, 2005.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The field of the invention is overhead suspension storage racks.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Many different types of overhead storage racks are known. Overhead storage racks are typically hung from the ceiling to provide storage space where space is at a premium, such as a garage.

[0004] One problem with known storage racks, whether overhead or floor supported, is that the width is limited to that of a single plank, platform, or other member. This causes wholesalers and retailers to stock several different widths to accommodate different user demands, which in turn consumes valuable floor and storage space, and requires higher inventory costs.

[0005] Thus, there is still a need for modular overhead storage racks that are relatively compact, allowing desirable retail packing, and assembles easily.

[0006] This and all other referenced patents and applications are incorporated herein by reference in their entirety. Furthermore, where a definition or use of a term in a reference, which is incorporated by reference herein is inconsistent or contrary to the definition of that term provided herein, the definition of that term provided herein applies and the definition of that term in the reference does not apply.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] The present invention provides apparatus, systems and methods in which a storage system comprises a rack of multiple platforms connectable to one another in a first direction, where each of the platforms has segments that connect to one another along a direction other than the first direction, via a user-operable coupling.

[0008] In a preferred embodiment, the platforms are rectangular, and are connected at their long ends. The segments of each platform are also rectangular, but they are connected along their long sides. In such embodiments, the connection between platforms is perpendicular to the length of the rack, while the connection between segments is parallel to the length of the rack.

[0009] The segments of individual platforms are preferably coupled together with snap fit connections, and supported from their undersides by transverse supports, and the transverse supports are supported from their undersides by longitudinal supports. The transverse supports are preferably perpendicular to the longitudinal supports.

[0010] Adjacent platforms can be coupled in any suitable manner, including at the ends of the longitudinal supports. Adjacent platforms may, but need not touch one another.

[0011] Each of the platforms in the rack can advantageously be supported from above by one, two, or more pairs of legs. Legs can alternatively or additionally be disposed between the platforms. Preferred legs are telescoping, allowing easy adjustment of their lengths. It is further contemplated that the telescoping mechanism can have a finger operable detent that cooperates with a catch to fix the length until the user can insert a secure pin.

[0012] In another aspect, a polymeric ring can be advantageously positioned at an end of one of the telescoping components of a leg to reduce noise and vibration. Similarly, polymeric rings can be placed at the ends of the longitudinal supports.

[0013] Various objects, features, aspects and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from the following detailed description of preferred embodiments of the invention, along with the accompanying drawings in which like numerals represent like components.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

[0014] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a storage rack having three platforms.

[0015] FIG. 2 is an exploded perspective view a platform of FIG. 1.

[0016] FIG. 3 is non-exploded view of the platform of FIG. 2.

[0017] FIG. 4 is an exploded perspective view of a pair of longitudinal supports, and corresponding pairs of legs.

[0018] FIG. 5 is a non-exploded perspective view of the pair of longitudinal supports, and corresponding pairs of legs of FIG. 4.

[0019] FIG. 6 is an exploded perspective view of a telescoping member of a leg showing a detent and a polymeric ring.

[0020] FIG. 7 is a exploded perspective view of a leg

[0021] FIG. 8 is a non-exploded perspective view of the leg of FIG. 7.

[0022] FIG. 9 is an exploded perspective view an embodiment of the platform of FIG. 1.

[0023] FIG. 10 is a non-exploded view of the platform of FIG. 9.

[0024] FIG. 11 is a perspective view of an alternative embodiment using aluminum slats instead of plastic platforms.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0025] In FIG. 1, a storage rack 1 generally includes platforms 10A, 10B, and 10C, and legs 20. Each of the platforms 10A, 10B, and 10C comprises three segments 12A1-12A3 for platform 10A, 12B1-12B3 for platform 10B, 12C1-12C3 for platform 10C. There is a pair of transverse supports 30A-30C underneath each of the platforms, and two longitudinally oriented supports 40A-40C beneath each of the pairs of transverse supports 30A-30C, respectively. The platforms 10A, 10B, and 10C are coupled together at the ends of the longitudinally oriented supports 40A-40C, and held from above using legs 20.

[0026] It should be apparent from FIG. 1 that the various platforms are connected to one another in a first direction 50, whereas each of the platforms has segments that connect to one another along a second direction 60, which is not only different from the first direction 50 but perpendicular to the first direction 50.

[0027] Those skilled in the art will immediately appreciate that rack 1 can be extended or reduced in length by adding or removing platforms. Rack 1 can also be extended or reduced in width by adding or reducing the number of segments in the different platforms. It should even be possible to have a rack with platforms having different lengths and different widths. For adjacent segments having different widths, the longitudinal supports may have been coupled using a zigzag connector. It should also be appreciated that the legs on the racks disclosed herein could stand on the floor, or that a side-connecting mechanism could be used to hang a rack on a wall.

[0028] Platforms can comprise any suitable material or materials, including, for example, metal, polymers, and so forth. In a preferred embodiment the segments of the platforms are made of lightweight plastic, wire mesh, wood, or any other suitable material. Further, the platforms can have suitable size and configuration, including especially configurations that are sized and dimensioned to accommodate standard cardboard banker's boxes.

[0029] In FIGS. 2 and 3 platform 10A comprises three segments 12A1-12A3. These segments are shown as being substantially rectangular, but can alternatively have any suitable shape, including for example, square, triangular, or having straight ends and curved or wavy sides. Each segment can have any suitable width, but preferably none of the segments is more than 40% of the broadest width of the platform, and more preferably none is more than 30% of the broadest width of the platform. From a marketing standpoint it is desirable for the various segments to be sized and dimensioned for convenient packaging, storage, and transportation.

[0030] Segments 12A1-12A3 are shown as having a lattice structure, which is relatively lightweight and is suitable for holding boxes, bags, and so forth. Other structures are also contemplated, including for example, structures with a solid top such as can be constructed using blow-molded plastic with internal baffles. Such structures can be advantageous in that they would prevent a spilled or leaked liquid from flowing down from the platform.

[0031] The segments 12A1-12A3 can be coupled in any suitable manner, including simple juxtaposition, snap-fits, tongue and groove, and so forth. In FIGS. 1-3 the various segments are coupled using a snap-fit mechanism, in which the sides of one of an adjacent segments has a mating and interlocking male extension 17A, and the other one of an adjacent segment has a corresponding receiving area 18A. Another embodiment of coupler is shown in FIGS. 9-10. Regardless of the mechanism(s) used, it is preferred that the inter-segment couplings are user operable, meaning that a typical end-user can connect and disconnect adjacent segments with a minimum of effort, and most preferably without any tools.

[0032] To provide added stability, the segments 12A1-12A3 are preferably molded or otherwise constructed to include collinear channels on their undersides, which are sized and dimensioned to receive corresponding ones of the transverse supports 30A-30C. Segments had advantageously have fingers 15 that cooperate to help hold the transverse supports to the corresponding segments.

[0033] From a marketing standpoint, one or more of the segments can have a logo 18. Also, while these Figures illustrate a platform having three segments, it should be appreciated that other quantities of segments can be combined to create a platform. Preferably, a platform is made by combining six segments.

[0034] FIGS. 4-8 show a pair of longitudinally oriented supports 40A and four legs 20. Adjacent supports can be coupled in any suitable manner, but are here shown as being coupled using an intervening pin 42. Alternatively, the ends of adjacent supports could be coupled using a sleeve (not shown). To reduce noise and vibration one can also include a polymeric ring 44 about an end of one or more of the supports.

[0035] Each of legs 30 generally includes two telescoping members 32A, 32B. To reduce noise and vibration one can include another polymeric ring 36 about an end of one or more of the members 32A, 32B. Distal ends of legs 30 preferably have corner mount structures 34 facilitate mounting of the legs to a ceiling, either by horizontally-driven or vertically-driven fastening means, including nails and screws. The legs 30 can advantageously include a finger operable detent 38 that cooperates with a catch 39 to fix a length of the leg 30. A security pin 37 can be used to lock the telescoping members 32A, 32B at a fixed length.

[0036] Legs 30 can be coupled to the platforms in any suitable manner. To provide significant strength and stability, legs 30 preferably include a channel through which extends the intervening pin 42, or one or both of adjacent longitudinally oriented supports (not shown). A cap 46 can be used at the terminal end of a longitudinally oriented support or the intervening pin 42.

[0037] FIGS. 9-10 show an embodiment of the coupler where the segments 112B-112B3 are coupled by snap-fit connectors, the snap-fit connector comprises male member 117B, and female member 118B. the male members 117B has user operable fingers 117C that can be biased by a user to disconnect the segments. In operation, a user would bias the fingers 117C towards each other, thereby enabling the exiting of male member 117B from female member 118B.

[0038] FIG. 9 shows another embodiment of the transverse support. Here, as oppose to a solid flat metal strip as shown in FIG. 2, transverse support 130B is made of sheet metal and has a cross-sectional configuration that enhances structural integrity. FIG. 9 shows a cross-section configuration similar to a "C." Other suitable shapes and configuration are also possible and is readily appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art to provide structural integrity. The use of sheet metal is also advantageous in that sheet metal transverse support is lighter and easier to manufacture than a solid piece of metal strip.

[0039] In FIG. 10, transverse support 130B is secured in place by stop tab 116. Stop tab 116 is disposed on segments that receives the two ends of the transverse support. Here,

the two ends of transverse support 130B is received by segments 112B1 and 112B3. Stop tab 116 is a protrusion preferably formed from the segments to keep the transverse support. The function of stop tab 116 is similar to that of finger 15 in FIG. 3.

[0040] In FIG. 11, an alternative design of a storage rack 101, generally includes platforms 110A, 110B, and 110C, and legs 120. Each of the platforms 110A, 110B, and 110C comprises five slats 112A1-112A5 for platform 110A, 112B1-112B5 for platform 110B, 112C1-112C5 for platform 110C. There is a pair of longitudinally oriented supports 1140A-140B running beneath all of the slats. The longitudinally oriented supports 140A-140B are held from above using legs 120.

[0041] The slats can comprise any suitable material, including especially aluminum or other metal, alloy, or composite. Although five appears experimentally to be an optimum number of slats, it is contemplated that one could have platforms with a greater or lesser number of slats than five, and indeed different platforms could have different numbers of slats. Where the slats contain metal, it is considered to be advantageous from weight and cost bases for the slats to be hollow, or to have "I", "C", "E", "H" or other cross-sections.

[0042] Thus, specific embodiments and applications of modular overhead storage have been disclosed. It should be apparent, however, to those skilled in the art that many more modifications besides those already described are possible without departing from the inventive concepts herein. The inventive subject matter, therefore, is not to be restricted except in the spirit of the appended claims. Moreover, in interpreting both the specification and the claims, all terms should be interpreted in the broadest possible manner consistent with the context. In particular, the terms "comprises" and "comprising" should be interpreted as referring to elements, components, or steps in a non-exclusive manner, indicating that the referenced elements, components, or steps may be present, or utilized, or combined with other elements, components, or steps that are not expressly referenced. Where the specification claims refers to at least one of something selected from the group consisting of A, B, C . . . and N, the text should be interpreted as requiring only one element from the group, not A plus N, or B plus N, etc.

What is claimed is:

1. A storage system comprising:

first and second platforms connectable to one another in a first direction;

each of the platforms comprising first and second segments that connect to one another along a direction other than the first direction, via a user-operable coupling; and

first and second legs that suspends the first platform.

2. The system of claim 1 wherein each of the first and second platforms has a long end, and the first direction is longitudinal, coupling the platforms at their long ends.

3. The system of claim 1 wherein the first platform comprises a molded plastic.

4. The system of claim 1 wherein the first platform has a length and a width, and none of the segments of the first platform comprises more than 40% of the width.

5. The system of claim 1 wherein the first platform has a length and a width, and none of the segments of the first platform comprises more than 30% of the width.

6. The system of claim 1 wherein the first and second legs are disposed between the first and second platforms.

7. The system of claim 1 wherein the first and second legs are disposed on opposite sides of the first platform, and coupled using a first support beam that supports the first platform.

8. The system of claim 7 further comprising a second support beam that supports the second platform, and a user operable coupling that couples the first and second support beams.

9. The system of claim 7 wherein the first support beam is longitudinally oriented with respect to the first platform.

10. The system of claim 1 wherein the first leg has telescoping components.

11. The system of claim 10 further comprising a finger operable detent that cooperates with a catch to fix a length of the telescoping components.

12. The system of claim 10 further comprising a polymeric ring at an end of one of the telescoping components.

13. The system of claim 1 wherein at least one of the platforms comprises a plurality of metal containing slats.

* * * * *