US006154928A

United States Patent [19]

Thom

[11] Patent Number: 6,154,928

[45] Date of Patent: Dec. 5, 2000

[54] **GRIPPER ADAPTER FOR DOORKNOBS**

[75] Inventor: **Paul Thom**, Montclair, N.J.

[73] Assignee: **Bel-Art Products, Inc.**, Pequannock, N.J.

[21] Appl. No.: **09/223,361**

[22] Filed: **Dec. 30, 1998**

[51] **Int. Cl.**[7] **E05B 1/04**

[52] **U.S. Cl.** **16/413**; 16/414; 16/421; 16/DIG. 12; 16/DIG. 30; 292/DIG. 2; 292/DIG. 63

[58] **Field of Search** ..... 16/413, 414, 421, 16/DIG. 12, DIG. 30; 292/DIG. 2, DIG. 8, DIG. 63

[56] **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

D. 211,398	6/1968	Hall .	
D. 329,590	9/1992	Chapman .	
1,410,605	3/1922	Schacht .	
2,100,818	11/1937	Redman .	
2,721,597	10/1955	Pitrella .	
2,731,056	1/1956	Anson .	
3,072,955	1/1963	Mitchell .	
3,249,990	5/1966	Schlage .	
3,313,057	4/1967	Leddy .	
3,427,680	2/1969	Gilbert .	
3,827,739	8/1974	Overholser .	
3,893,205	7/1975	Anderson et al. .	
3,909,878	10/1975	Natinsky .	
3,960,396	6/1976	Miyahara .	
3,965,529	6/1976	Hadzimahalis .	
3,995,650	12/1976	DiVito .	
4,000,539	1/1977	Neyer .	
4,094,210	6/1978	Wirtz et al. .	
4,223,931	9/1980	Neary .	
4,504,087	3/1985	Pennington .	
4,571,111	2/1986	Keogh .	
4,835,816	6/1989	Graef .	
4,971,375	11/1990	Grecco .	
4,972,545	11/1990	Ozagir et al. .	
4,999,875	3/1991	Rybak .	
5,008,551	4/1991	Randolph .	
5,231,733	8/1993	Dittman	16/114 R
5,355,552	10/1994	Huang	16/111 R
5,495,641	3/1996	Going et al. .	
5,701,635	12/1997	Hawkes .	
5,860,190	1/1999	Cano	16/114 R

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

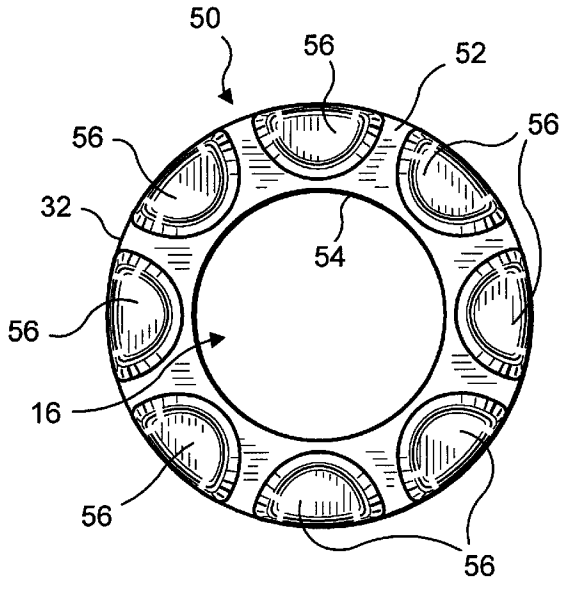
28 28 781	1/1980	Germany .

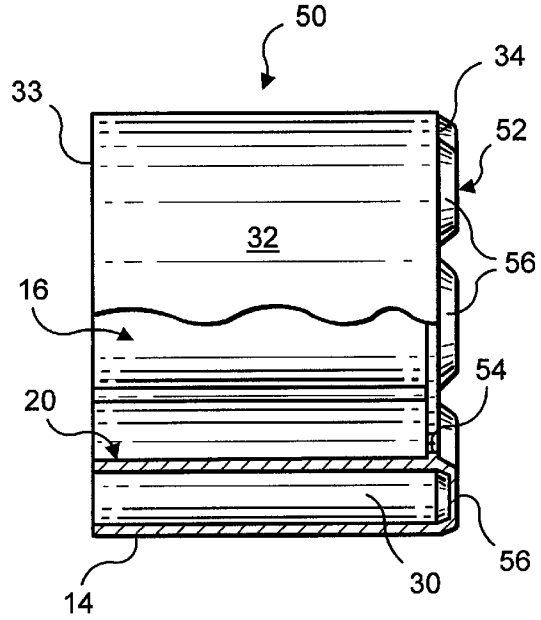
Primary Examiner—Anthony Knight
Assistant Examiner—Alison K. Pickard
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Lawrence G. Fridman

[57] **ABSTRACT**

A device facilitating operation of a doorknob, comprising a tubular body member having a continuous wall with an outer gripping surface and an inner surface defining bore adapted for receiving the doorknob. A plurality of resiliently deformable projections extend inwardly from the inner surface of the wall. A distance between opposing projections before installation of the device on the doorknob is smaller than a cross dimension of the knob. Each projection has a pair of spaced end portions formed integrally with the inner surface of the wall. The outer gripping surface of the continuous wall includes a generally curved section between each pair of spaced end portions before the device is installed on the knob. Deformation of the projections upon installation of the device on the knob causes the spaced end portions of each projection to spread apart and embrace an outer periphery of the doorknob.

14 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets





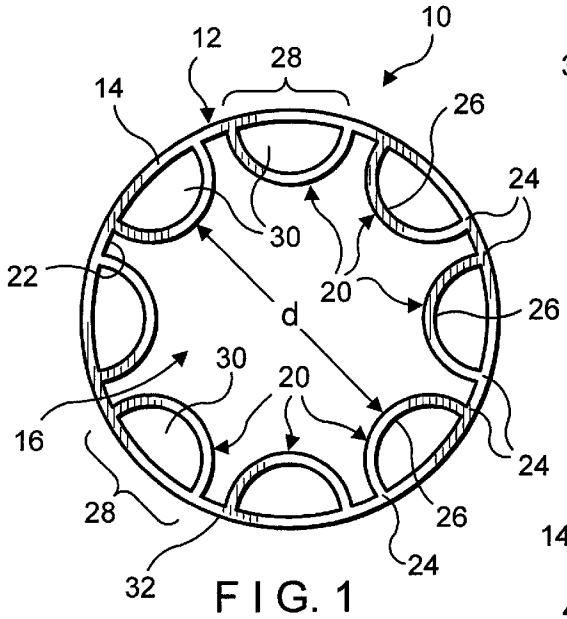


FIG. 1

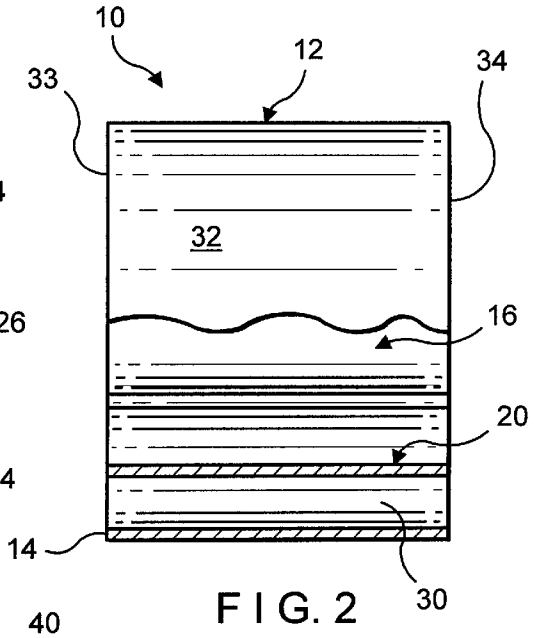


FIG. 2

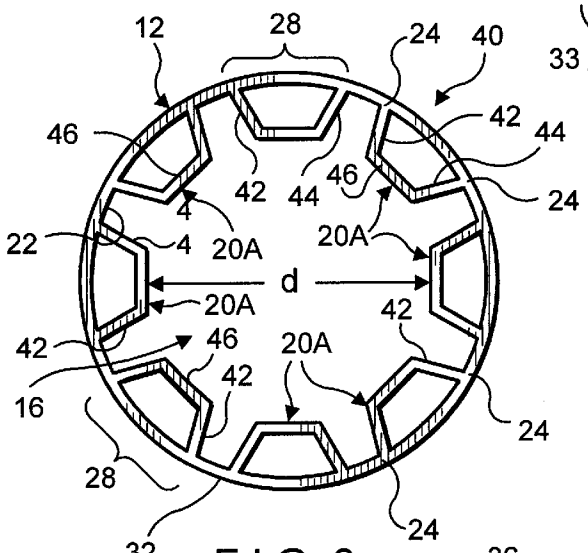


FIG. 3

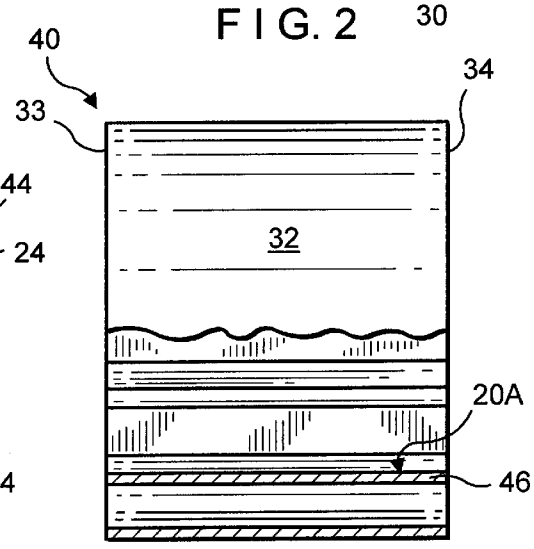


FIG. 4

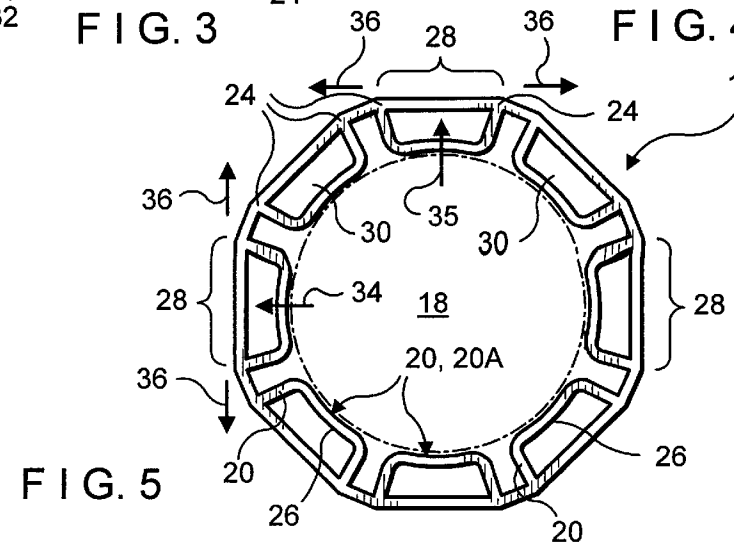


FIG. 5

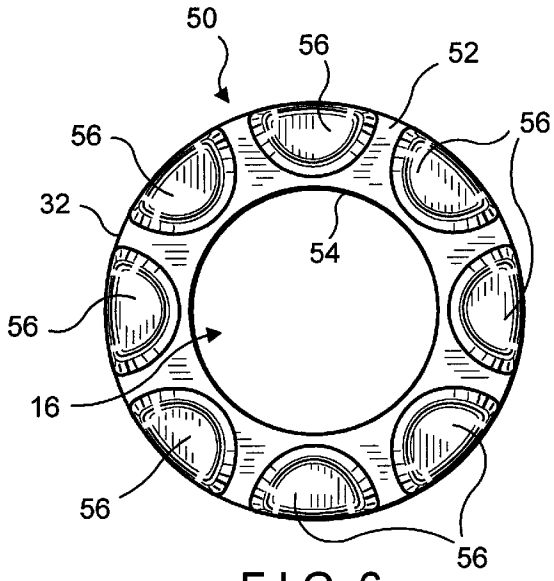


FIG. 6

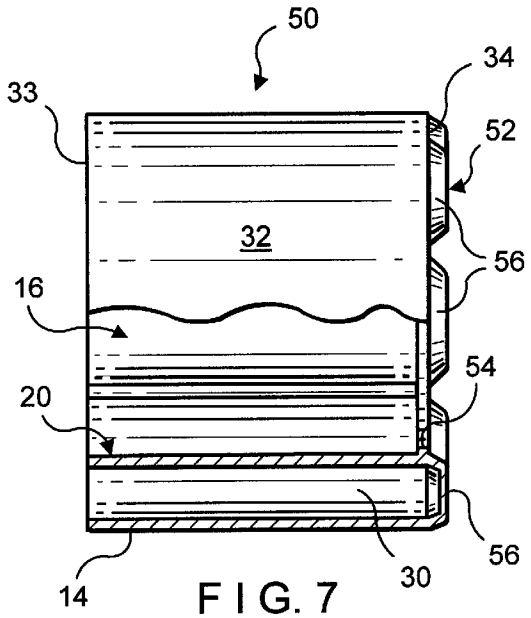


FIG. 7

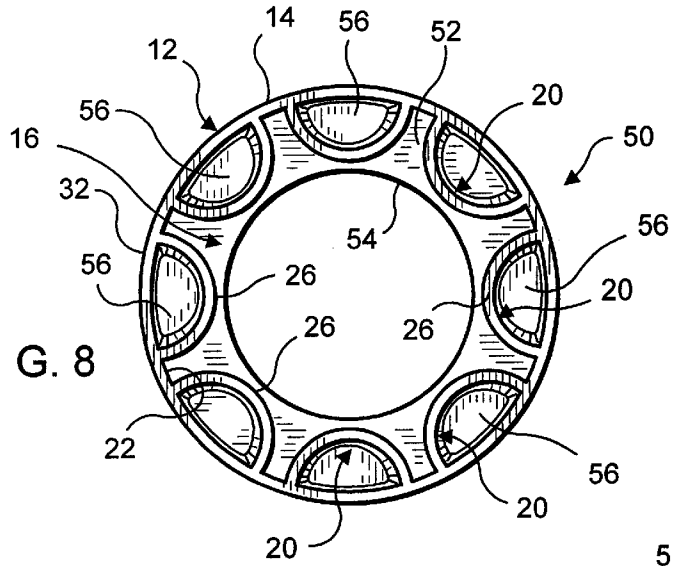


FIG. 8

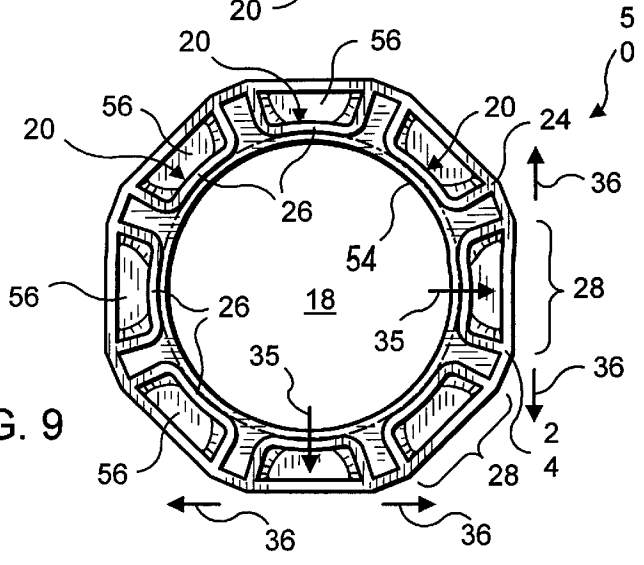


FIG. 9

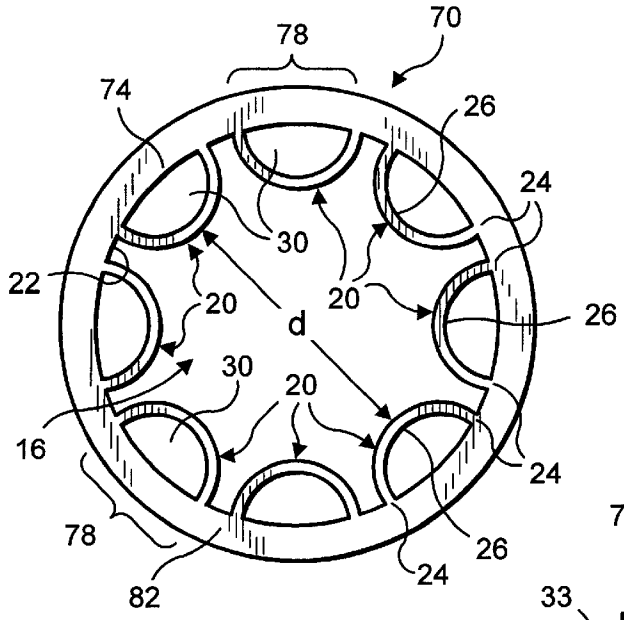


FIG. 10

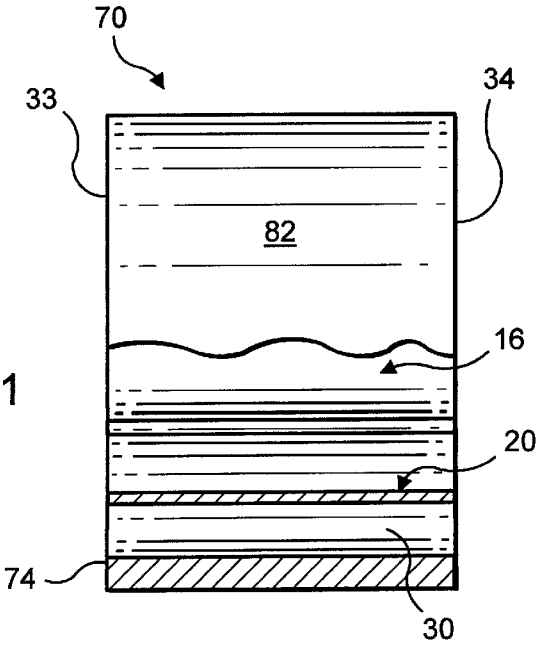


FIG. 11

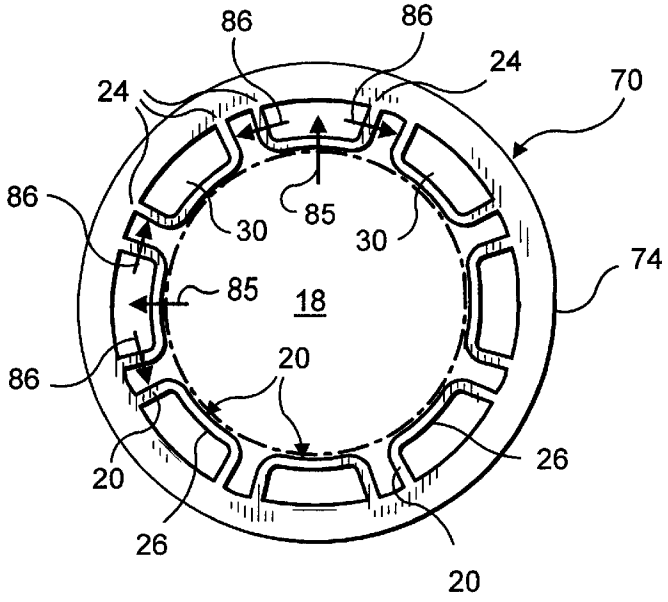


FIG. 12

GRIPPER ADAPTER FOR DOORKNOBS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates to doorknob accessories or the like, and more particularly to a device attachable to a doorknob so as to facilitate turning of the doorknob by a user.

2. Description of the Related Art

Many doorknobs are round in shape and sized to be conveniently grasped and turned by a hand of a user for opening a door. Although grasping and turning the doorknob is a simple task, various disabilities can make this task painfully difficult, if not impossible. For example, people suffering from arthritis in the wrist or hand may be unable to grasp the doorknob tightly enough to turn the knob, without incurring debilitating pain. Similarly, persons with severe hand deformities or others who have substantially lost use of the hand may be unable to grasp and turn the doorknob. These medical conditions may also adversely affect a person's ability to rotate other types of knobs as well, such as water knobs, etc.

In an effort to address this problem, various prior art solutions have been proposed. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 5,495,641 issued to Going et al. discloses an adapter for a doorknob that has an annular wall with a smooth inner surface and a plurality of levers and ridges formed on the outer surface. The adapter is installed over a doorknob such that the smooth inner surface engages an outer surface of the doorknob. The levers are directly engaged by a hand of a person rotating the knob.

Another doorknob adapter is proposed by U.S. Pat. No. 5,701,635 issued to Hawkes, and a device similar in construction is manufactured under the tradename BOOTEE DOORSTOP. These devices include an annular wall with a smooth inner surface that is formed of a resilient material.

Each of the above discussed devices is positioned over a doorknob in such a manner that the smooth inner surface engages an outer surface of the knob. When installed, a rear portion of the annular wall extends beyond the doorknob to thereby prevent the doorknob from contacting and damaging a wall when the door is swung open.

Installation of doorknob adapters with smooth inner surfaces, such as discussed above, can be a difficult task for people with debilitating hand conditions. This is because such types of adapters must be pressed and stretched over the doorknobs while faced with adverse frictional forces that are primarily intended to prevent relative movement of the adapter and the doorknob during turning operations. Removal of these types of adapters can also be a difficult task. Furthermore, the doorknob adapters or grippers formed with smooth inner surfaces can be used for engagement with the doorknobs having limited variation of outside dimensions.

Thus, it has been a long felt and unsolved need for a gripper or doorknob adapter which can be easily installed and operated by individuals having difficulty in exercising grasping force by their hands. There is also a need for an adapter which is capable of being used with a wide variety of sizes of the doorknobs, the adapter providing improved engagement between a hand of the user and exterior of the adapter.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the invention, a device for facilitating the turning of a knob, such as a doorknob, faucet knob, volume control knob, or the like, comprises a tubular body member with a continuous wall that defines an inner bore. The bore is adapted to receive a knob. At least one projection extends from the inner surface and into the bore. The continuous wall includes an outer gripping surface and the at least one projection is resiliently deformable upon engagement with an outer surface of the knob to thereby frictionally hold the outer surface of the knob.

In one embodiment, a plurality of projections is spaced along the inner surface of the wall. A distance between opposing pairs of projections is smaller than a cross dimension of the knob before installation of the device on the knob.

Each projection can include a pair of spaced end portions integrally formed with the inner surface of the wall. The outer gripping surface of the continuous wall can include a generally curved section between each pair of spaced end portions before the device is installed on the knob. In some embodiments of the invention, deformation of the projections upon installation of the device on the knob causes the spaced end portions of each projection to spread apart and at least partially straighten the generally curved sections to thereby create a multi-faceted outer gripping surface.

According to a further embodiment of the invention, a device for facilitating the turning of a knob comprises a tubular body member having a continuous wall defining an inner bore adapted for receiving a knob, the continuous wall including an outer gripping surface and an inner surface; and a plurality of spaced projections extending circumferentially around the inner surface. Each projection has an innermost portion that, combined with the other innermost portions, define a knob reception opening with a circumference that is smaller than a circumference of the knob before installation of the device on the knob. The projections are resiliently deformable upon engagement with an outer surface of the knob to thereby frictionally hold the tubular member on the knob.

According to an even further embodiment of the invention, the tubular member has opposite ends and an end wall formed at one of the ends. An opening formed in the end wall has a circumference that is less than the circumference of the knob reception opening.

The term "circumference" as used herein and in other parts of the specification, including the claims, refers to the distance around the perimeter of an object or opening, and is not to be limited to circles or other rounded surfaces, as other shapes fall within the meaning and scope of the invention.

There has thus been outlined the more readily apparent features of the invention so that the detailed description thereof that follows may be better understood, and so that the present contribution to the art may be better appreciated. There are, of course, additional features of the invention that will be described hereinafter which will form the subject matter of the appended claims. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the preferred embodiments may readily be used as a basis for designing other structures, methods and systems for carrying out the several purposes of the present invention.

It is important, therefore, that the claims be regarded as including such equivalent constructions since they do not depart from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is an end view of a doorknob adapter according to one embodiment of the invention;

FIG. **2** is a side view in partial cross section of the doorknob adapter of FIG. **1**;

FIG. **3** is an end view of a doorknob adapter according to another embodiment of the invention;

FIG. **4** is a side view in partial cross section of the doorknob adapter of FIG. **3**;

FIG. **5** is an end view of the doorknob adapters of FIGS. **1** and **3** installed on a doorknob;

FIG. **6** is a rear end view of a doorknob adapter according to a further embodiment of the invention;

FIG. **7** is a side view in partial cross section of the doorknob adapter of FIG. **6**;

FIG. **8** is a front end view of the doorknob adapter of FIG. **6**;

FIG. **9** is a front end view of the doorknob adapter of FIGS. **6–8** installed on a doorknob;

FIG. **10** is an end view of a doorknob adapter according to a still further embodiment of the invention;

FIG. **11** is a side view in partial cross section of the doorknob adapter of FIG. **10**; and

FIG. **12** is an end view of the doorknob adapter of FIGS. **10** and **11** installed on a doorknob.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring now to the drawings in general, and to FIGS. **1** and **2** in particular, wherein an adapter **10** for installation over a doorknob or the like is best illustrated. The adapter **10** includes a tubular body member **12** with a continuous outer wall **14**. The wall **14** can be substantially circular in cross section and defines an inner bore **16** that is sized to receive a doorknob **18** (shown in phantom line in FIG. **5**) or the like. A plurality of projections **20** are formed integrally with the wall **14** on an inner surface **22** thereof. Although the projections **20** can be of any length sufficient for engagement with a doorknob, in the preferred embodiment, the projections extend from a first end **33** to a second end **34** of the tubular body member **12**.

In the embodiment of FIGS. **1** and **2** each projection **20** is preferably semi-circular in cross section and includes opposing end portions **24** and an innermost curved portion **26** that extends inwardly toward an axial center of the bore **16** from the end portions. The gripping adapter of the invention is typically formed with a plurality of sections **28**. In this respect, each section **28** of the outer wall between the opposing end portions **24** together with the corresponding projection **20** form an inner chamber **30**. As best shown in FIG. **1**, in one embodiment of the invention each wall section **28** is preferably arcuate in cross section before installation on the doorknob **18**. An outer surface **32** of the tubular body member **12** forms a gripping surface that can be contacted by a hand of a user for turning the doorknob. As shown in FIG. **1**, the outer surface **32** is preferably substantially smooth before installation on the doorknob.

The distance d between the opposing projections **20** is preferably less than a diameter or other cross-dimension of the doorknob **18**. In this manner, when the adapter **10** is installed over a doorknob **18** (see FIG. **5**, for example), the innermost portion **26** of each projection **20** collapses or deforms in a radial direction as represented by arrow **35**, while the end portions **24** of each projection will be forced apart as represented by arrows **36**, to thereby stretch the wall sections **28** between the end portions **24** into a substantially planar shape. Thus, in this embodiment the plurality of projections associated with the inner wall surface **22**, enables the invention to transform the initially smooth outer surface **32** of the tubular member **12** into a multi-faceted outer surface (see FIG. **5**). This arrangement enhances engagement between the hand of the user so as to provide additional friction and leverage for persons that may have difficulty in grasping the adapter **10** with the thumb and fingers. The deformable nature of the projections **20**, and thus the inner chambers **30**, facilitates installation of the adapter **10** on a doorknob or the like, and accommodates a variety of doorknob types and sizes. When the installed adapter **10** is grasped by the hand of a user, the outer wall **14** in general and the wall sections **28** in particular are also deformable inwardly toward their corresponding innermost portion **26** to provide cushioning and a better grip for the person.

The body member **12**, including the wall **14** and projections **20**, is preferably formed of a resilient material, such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC), polyurethane, rubber or other elastomeric material, etc., that is electrically insulative offering a suitable amount of frictional holding force once installed on the doorknob and springs back to its original shape when removed. The electrically insulative properties of the material prevent electrostatic shock that may otherwise occur with metallic doorknobs by isolating the doorknob from the person. The resilient nature of the projections function as resilient spring members that exert radially inward forces around the perimeter of the doorknob to thereby frictionally grasp the doorknob and remain stationary with respect to the doorknob during turning.

If desired, the stiffness of each projection **20** can be slightly greater than the stiffness of the outer wall **14** such that each projection exhibits a greater resistance to deformation than the outer wall. This can be accomplished by forming each projection **20** with a greater thickness than the outer wall **14**.

With reference now to FIGS. **3** and **4**, an adapter **40** for a doorknob or the like according to another embodiment of the invention is illustrated, wherein like parts in the previous embodiment are represented by like numerals. The adapter **40** is similar in construction to the adapter **10** previously described, with the exception that the projections **20** are replaced with projections **20A**. Each of the projections **20A** includes a pair of legs **42** and **44** formed integrally with the outer wall **14** at end portions **24** and extend inwardly from the inner surface **22** of the tubular body member **12**. The legs **42** and **44** are oriented to converge toward each other and terminate at an innermost web portion **46**. This arrangement forms a projection having a generally trapezoidal cross section.

As in the previous embodiment, the stiffness of each projection **20A** can be slightly greater than the stiffness of the outer wall **14** and the distance d between opposing projections **20A** is preferably less than a cross-dimension of the doorknob **18**. In this manner, when the adapter **40** is installed over a doorknob **18** (See FIG. **5**), the innermost portion **46** and the legs **42** and **44** of each projection **20A** deforms in a radial direction as represented by the arrow **35**, while the end portions **24** of each projection are forced apart as represented by arrows **36**. Thus, the wall sections **28** between the end portions **24** are stretched into a substantially planar shape. In view of that, the initially smooth outer surface **32** of the tubular member **12** transforms into a multi-faceted outer surface.

Referring now to FIGS. **6–9**, an adapter **50** for a doorknob or the like according to a further embodiment of the invention is illustrated, wherein like parts in the previous embodi-

ments are represented by like numerals. The adapter **50** is similar in construction to the adapters **10** and **40** previously described, with the exception that an end wall **52** is formed at the end **34** of the tubular body member **12**. The end wall **52** extends from the outer surface **32** of the tubular body member **12** and includes an opening **54** that communicates with the inner bore **16**.

Preferably, the diameter of the opening **54** is less than the diameter defined by the undeformed innermost portions **26** to thereby limit how far the adapter **50** can be slid onto the doorknob. An end cap **56** is formed in the end wall **52** over each projection **20**. The end wall **52**, including the end caps **56**, assists in maintaining the original shape of the tubular body end **34** when the adapter **50** is installed on a doorknob, so as to enhance aesthetic appearance of the invention.

As in the previous embodiments, the stiffness of each projection **20** can be slightly greater than the stiffness of the wall **14**. Furthermore, the distance between opposing projections **20** is preferably less than a cross-dimension of the doorknob **18**. This enables the invention to transform the outer surface **32** of the tubular member **12** into a multi-faceted outer surface when installed on the doorknob.

Each of the projections **20** includes opposing end portions **24** and an innermost curved portion **26** extending toward the axial center of the bore **16**.

With reference now to FIGS. **10–12** , an adapter **70** for a doorknob or the like according to a still further embodiment of the invention is illustrated, wherein similar parts in the previous embodiments are represented by similar numerals. The adapter **70** is similar in construction to the adapter **10** previously described. However, the stiffness of the outer wall **74** is slightly greater than the stiffness of each projection **20**. This can be accomplished by forming the outer wall **74** with a greater thickness than the projections **20**.

Similar to the previous embodiments, the distance d between the opposing projections **20** is less than the cross-dimension of the doorknob **18**. Thus, when the adapter **70** is installed over a doorknob **18** (see FIG. **12**), the innermost portion **26** of each projection **20** deforms in a radial direction as represented by arrow **85**. In this manner the end portions **24** of each projection are forced apart as represented by arrows **86**, to thereby stretch the inner area of the wall **74** between the end portions **24** into a substantially elongated shape. However, in this embodiment the outer surface **82** remains substantially smooth after installation on the doorknob.

Although a definite number of projections are shown in each of the above embodiments, it is to be understood that more or less projections may be provided. Also, the height, length, thickness and shape of each projection, as well as the diameter, length, thickness and shape of the tubular body member **12**, can be modified based on the type of knob that the adapter is to be slipped over, and the reduced amount of turning force desired.

Moreover, although the above description particularly discloses the adapter utilized with doorknobs, it is to be understood that the adapter of the invention can be used with other types of rotating knobs, such as faucet knobs, volume control knobs, etc., and can be readily adaptable to knobs of various sizes and shapes. While the invention has been taught with specific reference to these embodiments, those skilled in the art will recognize that changes can be made in form and detail without departing from the spirit and the scope of the invention. The described embodiments are to be considered in all respects only as illustrative and not restrictive. The scope of the invention is, therefore, indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description. All changes that come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are to be embraced within their scope.

What is claimed is:

1. A device for facilitating turning of a knob, comprising:

a tubular body member having a continuous wall defining an inner bore adapted for receiving a knob, the continuous wall including an outer gripping surface and an inner surface; the tubular body member extending between a free end and a front end wall;

a plurality of projections positioned at spaced intervals on the inner surface and extending into the bore, each projection is formed with a pair of spaced end portions and having an innermost portion that together define a knob reception opening, the projections being resiliently deformable upon engagement with an outer surface of the knob to thereby frictionally hold the tubular member on the knob; and

each said projection extending between an open portion provided at the free end of the tubular member and a front portion, so that the front portion of each said projection terminates at an individual wall which extends outwardly from the front end wall of the tubular member.

2. A device according to claim **1**, wherein each projection is generally semi-circular in cross-section.

3. A device according to claim **1**, wherein each projection is generally trapezoidal in cross-section.

4. A device according to claim **1**, wherein each said individual wall closes the front portion of the respective projection.

5. A device according to claim **1**, wherein a distance between opposing projections before installation of the device on the knob is smaller than a cross dimension of the knob.

6. A device according to claim **5**, wherein the outer gripping surface of the continuous wall includes a generally curved section between each pair of spaced end portions before installation of the device on the knob, and further wherein deformation of the projections upon installation of the device on the knob causes the spaced end portions to spread apart and at least partially straighten the generally curved sections to thereby create a multi-faceted outer gripping surface.

7. A device according to claim **1**, wherein said plurality of projections comprises at least one opposing pair of projections, and further wherein a distance between said at least one opposing pair of projections of the device on the knob is smaller than a cross dimension of the knob.

8. A device according to claim **7**, wherein each projection includes a pair of spaced end portions integrally formed with the inner surface of the wall.

9. A device according to claim **8**, wherein the outer gripping surface of the continuous wall includes a generally curved section between each pair of spaced end portions before installation of the device on the knob, and further wherein deformation of the projections upon installation of the device on the knob causes the spaced end portions to spread apart and at least partially straighten the generally curved sections to thereby create a multi-faceted outer gripping surface.

10. A device according to claim **9**, wherein the tubular member has opposite ends, and further wherein each projection extends along the inner surface between the opposite ends.

11. A device according to claim **1**, wherein the outer gripping surface of the continuous wall includes a generally

curved section between each pair of spaced end portions before installation of the device on the knob, and further wherein deformation of the projections upon installation of the device on the knob causes the spaced end portions to spread apart and frictionally embrace the knob.

12. A device according to claim **11**, wherein the deformation of the projections at least partially straighten the generally curved sections to thereby create a multifaceted outer gripping surface.

13. A device according to claim **12**, and further comprising an opening extending through the front end wall, a circumference of the opening being less than the circumference of the knob reception opening.

14. A device for facilitating turning of a knob, comprising:

a tubular body member having a continuous wall defining an inner bore adapted for receiving a knob, the continuous wall including an outer gripping surface and an inner surface, the tubular member extending between a free end and a front end wall;

a plurality of projections positioned at spaced intervals on the inner surface and extending into the bore, each projection is formed with a pair of spaced end portions and having an innermost portion that together define a knob reception opening that is smaller than an outer dimension of the knob before installation of the device on the knob, the projections being resiliently deformable upon engagement with an outer surface of the knob to thereby frictionally hold the tubular member on the knob; and

each projection extending between an open portion provided at the free end of the tubular member and a front portion, so that the front portion of each said projection terminates at an individual wall closing the respective projection and extending outwardly from the front end wall of the tubular member;

wherein the outer gripping surface of the continuous wall includes a generally curved section between each pair of spaced end portions before installation of the device on the knob, and further wherein deformation of the projections upon installation of the device on the knob causes the spaced end portions to spread apart and frictionally embrace the knob.

* * * * *